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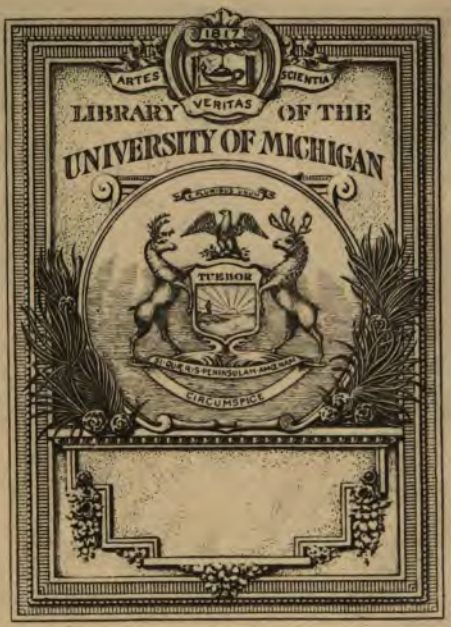
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LETTERS

FROM THE

NORTH OF ITALY.

VOL. II.

London: Printed by C. Roworth,
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LETTERS

FROM THE

NORTH OF ITALY.

ADDRESSED TO

HENRY HALLAM, Esq.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

With discourse that shifts and changes,
That at random roves and ranges,
Hither, thither, here and there,
Over ocean, earth and air;
To the pole and to the tropic,
Overrunning every topic—
—Tell us, is he drunk or mad?
—No, believe me, grave and sad.

THE BIRDS, *MS. Translation.*

VOL II.

LONDON:

JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET.

1819.

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TO

VOL. II.

LETTERS

FROM THE

NORTH OF ITALY.

LETTER XXXII.

On the Venetian Dialect—its Origin and Character—Venetian Poetry and Music, as connected with it—On the other Dialects of Italy.

Venice, November, 1817.

THE Venetian is the language generally spoken here, and indeed in all the considerable towns of this state, except a few, such as Brescia and Bergamo, which have a dialect of their own. Of such towns it may be observed, that they were not comprehended in the tract of country inhabited by the ancient *Veneti*, but settled by the Cisalpine Gauls.

The colour of the ancient language of this people glimmered through their Latin, as may

be seen in inscriptions collected by *Maffei*,* and it should seem probable that the original dialects of the different races of settlers in Italy are one remote cause of the variety of jargons which at present prevail there.

Of these the Venetian is undoubtedly the best. It is softer and more winning than the Tuscan, though it falls far beneath it in dignity and force. The judgment however of a foreigner is of little weight. It has had better testimonies borne to its merits by *Bettinelli*, and a host of Italian writers, who may naturally be supposed to have had a nicer and more discriminating sense of its perfections. In all the lighter and gayer walks of poetry it is delightful; and the Venetian verse is, I should say, compared with the verse of other nations, very much what Venetian painting is as to that of the rest of Europe.

Venice is indeed a little world by itself, with arts of its own and manners of its own. It is original in almost every thing; in its language, its pictures, its poetry, and its music; which,

* The Latin lapidary inscriptions found in the subalpine towns of Italy often mark the provinciality of the authors. Thus the W, one of the most characteristic marks of a tramontane alphabet, is to be found in those of the Gallic colonies.

however, may be all said to be *quales decet esse sorores.*

But our business is at present with the language. This is principally of Latin blood dashed with Greek, Sclavonic, and I know not what. The mixture of Greek,* which is infused in it, is however, perhaps, not greater than what prevails in the Italian; and, I believe, the original of many words which are usually considered as *aliens* might be found either in the pure or corrupter ages of latinity: for the inflections and deflections which these suffer, deceive our eyes, and it is often as difficult to trace such in their new forms, as it is to recognize the root of a plant in the variety and luxuriance of its branches. Who, for instance, would at first sight imagine that the Latin word *forma* was only the Doric μορφα turned inside out? or what Frenchmen would recognize wasp in the *waps* of provincial English? The same principle of change naturally prevails in the Italian dialects, and I recollect being called upon by a lower Florentine to look at a certain garden "where there were *staute.*"

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* Many familiar Venetian words are taken from the Greek, as Magari! (Μακαριος), which answers to the conditional *felice me!* of the Italian.

The instances I have quoted are of one description; there is a much larger class of another, which follow the natural and uniform bent of the language. Thus *caleghièr*, which has puzzled some etymologists, is Venetian for a shoe-maker: this word should, according to the Italian rules of inflection, be *calegajo*, as *botteghièr* makes *bottegajo*. Now considering the thing under this point of view, we see that *èr* and *ajo* are mere tails, and that the body of the word is *caliga*, the short boot amongst the Romans, from which Caligula took his name. Following therefore a simple rule of analogy, *caleghièr* is a boot or shoe-maker.

But referring to what I have said in a preceding paragraph as well as in the last, I have no doubt that one skilled in disentangling syllables, which get absolutely matted in time, might find in *Du Cange* the parentage of many words, whose derivation most puzzles us in Venetian.

Still there are vocables which cannot be ascribed to a Latin stem. Thus much is certain. But the mode of their introduction may be a subject of doubt and inquiry. Some contend (and such is the vulgar opinion) that the influx of these is to be ascribed to the intercourse of the Venetians with the barbarians, and the Greeks of Constantinople. A very little

consideration however will shew the fallacy of such a supposition.*

It is to be observed that the language is very nearly the same throughout the tract of country which has been termed inland and maritime Venice; that is, the region inhabited by the ancient *Veneti*, which corresponds, in a great degree, with the modern limits of the Venetian state. Now it is quite clear that the dialect of maritime Venice could not have received accessions of speech from the barbarians, for they never entered the lagoon; and it is equally clear that many parts of inland Venice were as little likely to naturalize Greek words from Constantinople, since they had no communication with that city.

Could we suppose that the candle had been thus lit at both ends, each would retain some signs of such a process, but this is so far from being the case, that the language of Venice is the same as that of Verona, and I should say that as little difference, in this respect, existed between the two cities, as may be traced between two contiguous counties in England. Reasoning therefore from the uniformity of their

* See *Filiasi* su' primi e secondi Veneti.

dialect, even at the two extremities of the tract through which it is spoken, is it not a fair induction that the aliens, to which I have alluded, had been for ages and ages denizened in the language?

Let us try this theory a little farther. All writers are agreed that the ancient *Veneti*, or Venetians, were a race differing in blood from the Gallic tribes who peopled the rest of Lombardy. *Lanzi*, almost the only man who has carried right principles of reasoning into investigations of national monuments, and who may be classed amongst the most ingenious and accurate of authors, I think, supposes the *Veneti* to have been a Greek and Celtic mixture, observing, that the infusion of Greek which he discovered in their inscriptions was purer than that which he found in the remains of the Etrurians.* This then may, at least, account for whatever there *was* or *is* of Greek in the language of this people. But whatever were the elements of their tongue, it is notorious they *had* one to themselves, however it was composed. This was afterwards, as that of all the aboriginal Italians, merged in the Latin, but many proofs might

* *Saggio di Lingua Etrusca.*

be adduced that, (like that of the Gauls, &c.) it communicated something of its own colour to the mass in which it mixed: For the lapidary inscriptions, furnished by the Venetian district and collected by *Maffei*, shew the same sort of ancient provinciality, (though of a different dye,) which marks those of the Gallic colonies; and in them may be seen some of the same commutations of letters, which are common at present in the Venetian dialect. In the *Epistolæ ad Familiares* of Cicero there is a letter in which he mentions words as current in these provinces which were not known at Rome. Livy was accused of *patavinity* or *paduanism*, (whatever might be meant by the charge;) and it was said of Catullus that he had introduced new forms of speech into the Latin. Circumstances might be adduced in proof of these being *Veronisms*. Thus he calls a torrent *pronus*, and is, I believe, singular in its use. It may, perhaps, be supposed, that this was the mere substitution for the substantive of one of its ordinary and appropriate epithets; but it is to be remarked that *pronio* still signifies torrent in the province of Verona.

I have already hinted my belief that what I have here attempted to prove, applied probably to all Italy. In additional confirmation of this notion, *Algarotti*, somewhere, mentions a letter

of *Varus* to Virgil, in which, commenting on an epigram, he criticizes the word *putus*, averring it not to be Latin. Now *putto*, though naturalized in Italian, is at present, I believe, only familiarly used in the Mantuan and neighbouring districts, and would not be understood by the uneducated in Tuscany.

Whether or no the position I have contended for extends south as well as north, I have, I think, made it good in the Venetian province. If therefore there is, as I have first shewn, reason to suppose that *foreign* words, such as have been described, were of early introduction, (and there is every ground for saying that such existed in the language of the *Veneti* and tainted the Latin, when adopted by them,) it seems to me equally reasonable to suppose that these same anomalies have been transmitted to the dialect which has succeeded to the Latin.

In rejecting however the idea that the Greek, Sclavonic, or other terms which puzzle us in Venetian are of modern origin, I do not mean to say that modern Sclavonic slang, (such as oaths, &c.) has not crept into use, in (comparatively speaking) modern times; but these oaths, for instance, merely float upon the surface, and are no more incorporated with the language than Gaëlic interjections are in certain of the Scotch

dialects, or than English oaths (adopted for the convenience of trade) are in the French of Jersey and Guernsey.*

Having now brought all the little learning of which I am possessed, to bear upon the origin of the Venetian dialect, and indeed exhausted my ammunition; I proceed to give some account of its more modern history. Partially cultivated for a time, it was early superseded by the Italian, as a written language; nor was this change confined to literary men, any more here than in the rest of Italy: for it may now be said that all classes throughout the peninsula, who can write, compose in something as like Italian as they can brew it.

The dialects have however remained every where in oral use amongst the vulgar, and the vernacular of Venice (as well as some others) almost as much amongst high as low. As to the latter class indeed, it is hardly an exaggeration to say they are as ignorant of Italian as of English.†

* The inhabitants of these islands surrendered their own natural oaths on becoming Hugonots; but finding the want of them in their maritime intercourse with Southampton and Weymouth, adopted English ones.

† My she servant here said one morning to my own, in my presence, *Vago ad impizar el fogo; và ben dito cussi?—Si—Gho piasèr, perchè mi voggio imparar a parlar in Inglese.* The

But though the Venetian ceased to exist as a written language, either as employed in serious branches of literature or the concerns of business, as the gay pursued tilting as a sport after it had ceased to be a mode of real combat, so certain airy wits have descended into this deserted arena and given no contemptible proofs of activity and grace.

The happiest efforts of these poets have usually been what we term Venetian ballads, a great number of which, though cruelly disfigured, are current in England. The music to which these songs are set is well known in London. But no idea can be formed of them by hearing them any where but at Venice. For the pronunciation, if ever to be imitated, is only to be caught from Venetian lips, and nothing can be more ludicrous in the eyes and ears of one who "has swam in a gondola," than the gay or impassioned strain of the poetry, contrasted with the stucco-face of the statue which doles it forth at home. Here it is seconded by all the nice inflections of voice, all the grace of gesture, and all that play of features which distinguishes the Venetian women. It is now how-

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absurdity of this jargon consists in the woman's thinking that she was speaking *English*, whereas the slight deviation which she made from her own dialect was into Italian.

ever almost as difficult to find one who can sing a Venetian ballad as one who can chaunt verses from *Tasso*.

This poet has been, as you know, translated into all or nearly all the Italian dialects, but with most success into that of this state, ministering matter for their music to the gondoleers of former times. But "the songs of other years" have died away. I requested one, the other day, from a man who was said to be amongst the last depositories of them; but found I had touched a tender string in asking for a song of Sion. He shook his head, and told me that, "in times like these, he had no heart to sing."

This boat-music was destined for the silence and solitude of the night; but it should seem that some of our countrymen entertain very different notions on this subject; as I saw lately a sober-looking Englishman, with his wife and child, embarked on the grand canal at mid-day, with two violins and a drum. Yet they did not look like people who would have paraded Bond Street, at the time of high water with fiddles in a barouche.

But I have somehow or other got from Venetian poetry to Venetian music, and from a gondola into a carriage. I have however, I

believe, said all I had to communicate upon these subjects.

In the mean time something yet remains to be said upon the dialects of Italy in general. These are all, I repeat, like the Venetian, the bastard progeny of the Latin, however alloyed by baser metal, and nearly allied to the modern Italian. Notwithstanding this, the mixture of foreign words which has been introduced into them and the twist which has been given to their own natural roots, renders them extremely difficult to be understood. Hence the reports of travellers, who describe long conversations held with the peasantry of Italy, are to be received with great caution, and I can say with truth that I once passed some days at Bologna, without being able to gather even the general sense of what was said to me by any of the uneducated. Yet, when my ear had insensibly accustomed itself to this jargon at the theatre, from the mouth of one of the masques, described in a former letter, I found that its elements were already known to me, and might be considered (to use a mean but expressive metaphor) as Tuscan vocables gutted and trussed. The running title indeed of a Bolognese poem, which is now lying on my table, may

serve as an illustration of this: it is entitled *L' D'sgrazie d' B'rtuldin.* This sort of disembowelment, as well as the torture of their inflections, seems to have been the common destiny of the dialects. Words leave letters as we leave luggage behind us in our travels. Thus the Tuscan word *capo,* has lost its *p* by the time it arrives at Venice, and becomes *cao.* In its further progress to Milan, it drops its *a* and becomes *co;* in which state it may be found in the *Inferno* of *Dante,* who uses the expression *in co del ponte.* From *Capo* and *co* then may be learned the general principle of change throughout the peninsula.

After stating the Venetian to be the best of the dialects, I will (though I cannot venture to discriminate intermediate shades) state what I conceive to be decidedly the worst. These are, the vernacular of Bologna,* Genoa and Milan. Yet one of these (however harsh and inelegant) is distinguished by that spirit of poetry which is peculiar to Italy. Thus the holly is called in

* It is very difficult to understand what *Dante* has said respecting the Bolognese dialect. The only supposition which can explain his encomium is, either, that it has totally changed its character, a thing which appears impossible, or that *Dante,* in his inveterate hatred to Florence, sought to exalt another city at its expense. The latter is my own belief.

Milanese the *lion-laurel*, and the strawberry, *May-scarlet*.

When I was first in this country, I began making a collection of popular poetry, for the purpose of illustrating the different dialects, but having lost a part of my cabinet, never had the courage to resume the task. I regret this the more, as I am convinced it is the only way of making an estimate of them: for though specimens of these may be found amongst the works of the learned, and a collection of the various translations of *Tasso* already referred to, might be thought sufficient to the purpose, it is evident that the provincial dialect of scholars must savour of the more general and polished language in which they read and compose. This observation may indeed be stretched farther, and it may be said that even those who approach the educated can hardly be considered as credible witnesses in such a matter. Yet it is thus that foreigners are continually deceived, who consider the speech of a *servitor di piazza* as a specimen of the language of the place where he plies. *I* fell into this mistake on my first visit to Italy: I remember that walking to see some piece of antiquity in the neighbourhood of Rome, my attention was caught by a wild flower in the fields, when the *laquais de place* observing it,

said, "*Commanda che lo* CARPA?" Had I left the city next day, I should probably have remarked upon the mixture of latinity still to be found in the vernacular of Rome: I stayed long enough to discover that it had no more of this than many of its sister dialects, and that my *laquais de place* talked like a cardinal.*

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* The polished language of Rome, which differs *toto cælo* from the vulgar vernacular, is to be considered as sophisticated Italian. The assemblage of priests from different parts of Italy has rêndered a *lingua aulica* more especially necessary there, and *this* has naturally taken a very strong tinge from the Latin, such being the language of church and chancery.

This influx of latinisms has a very bad effect, and renders the Italian of Rome particularly disagreeable to me. The reason seems to be this: Though almost all Italian words have a similar origin, they have by long intermixture acquired a character of their own. Now the introduction of a quantity of crude materials changes the colour and flavour of the mess, into which they are cast.

LETTER XXXIII.

On the Italian Language—its proper Designation and Character—its extreme Difficulties—to be distinguished from the Florentine or Tuscan, which has a Physiognomy of its own—a Summary of its Beauties and Defects—its Origin, and the Character of the Parent Tongue—on its Pronunciation.

Venice, November, 1817.

The general view which I have taken of the Italian dialects naturally leads to the consideration of the tongue, which is to be considered as the queen and empress of them all: this has been by some called *Florentine*, by some *Tuscan*, and by others, (and these are more numerous,) *Italian*.

But as something more than is at first apparent, depends upon its name, it will not be amiss to examine the grounds upon which these different designations rest. If this language is to be called *Florentine*, as contended by Machiavel and others, the term would restrict its elements to such as are furnished by Florence, excluding words of common currency in neighbouring cities, as *Sienna*, &c. But for this principle the veriest

provincial purist would scarcely contend. Again, if it is to be *Tuscan*, this name would, on the same grounds, confine its vocabulary to the limits of the dukedom: but almost all the classical authors of the peninsula have disdained so narrow a field. I conclude, therefore, that it is more properly as well as more popularly called *Italian;* but in an examination of its character I shall throw more lights on its designation.

The Italian (to describe it as accurately as I can) is an ideal language, which has indeed what may be termed the *Tuscan* for its base,* but receives and naturalizes forms of speech from all the provinces; being, as *Monti*, echoing *Dante*, says, to be found every where in parts, but no where as a whole.

It is perhaps this character which renders it a delightful vehicle for verse, even in the eyes of those who will not allow it to be such for prose; for whether poetry, in the ab-

* This I take to be undeniable by a fair critic; yet the not admitting this principle (for I do not find it any where admitted) has given the Tuscans their only vantage ground in this long disputed argument.

stract, be, or be not (as is contended) a thing essentially ideal, such is undoubtedly the spirit of Italian poetry. As is the statue then, such should be the drapery. For conceive an ideal work of the finest sculpture, clothed in a graceful but familiar dress: such a vision disgusts us as soon as formed. But give the same figure drapery of composition, and it pleases. It is for this reason that all attempts to translate Petrarch into English have so egregiously failed. To catch and preserve his spirit of diction in a vernacular language, is as hopeless as it would be to fix the fugitive tints of the rainbow and paint them in body colours.

But having called up Petrarch as a witness, I cannot immediately dismiss him, as I have occasion for him again as an evidence who is to speak yet more directly to my first position. This poet is acknowledged to have been one of the main reformers, if not one of the architects, of his language. And from what mine did he extract his materials? Not out of "quarries which he found at home." For, though a Tuscan born, he never, I believe, passed any length of time in his native province, which he left young, and with the vernacular dialect of which he could not have been familiarly acquainted. A large

part of his materials may be said to be " *peregrini* marmi—

"Da dotta mano in varie forme sculti."*

Ariosto.

Nor was he licentious in this; for the permission of importation on which he acted is to be found in the *Vocabolario della Crusca*, which has (no matter to what extent or under what reservations) completely established the principle.

But without adopting the laws of this capricious code in their detail, for indeed they are too contradictory to be capable of complete observation, let us see what appears to have governed the great mass of Italian writers. I have already said that Tuscan forms the base of their Italian, but it remains to shew what modifications it has undergone, and what changes have been grafted upon it. I shall illustrate these as familiarly as I can.

In every language words get naturally distorted from their original meaning, and of this I might adduce various examples in our own. They sometimes have it improperly enlarged, but oftener contracted, as in the case of the English words *aspersions* and *audacious*, which

* Rare foreign marbles, wrought by cunning hand.

admitted either a good or bad signification, in the time of Shakspeare; but which are both now taken only in an evil sense. They sometimes however also extend their pretensions. This has been done by the word *inveterate.* Thus, though to say *an inveterate enemy* is correct, you will, I think, agree with me, that to talk of any one *being inveterate* against another would be a barbarism, were it not now sanctioned by the use of porters and of peers. Of such abuses the Tuscan is full: It has been the task of the compilers of the Italian, to reform them, to polish right and left, rubbing off the rust, perhaps the precious rust of antiquity;—to clothe words according to an uniform system of orthography, and recast all incorrect forms of phraseology.

These changes, you may say, have been effected or attempted in all languages; but these reformers have introduced amongst others, one which is single in its kind. Though they have accepted many Tuscan or Florentine words, they have rejected many others, not only of what are vulgarly called *fine words*, but several amongst those which are the most familiar. Thus *cesoje* means scissars at Florence, but *forbici* is the word adopted into general Italian use; and I might adduce a variety of similar examples.

Other differences were also introduced in compounding this language, which have produced a yet wider effect. The changes I allude to affect both syntax and prosody: every one, for example, at all conversant with the language, knows that the penultimate syllable of the indicative-imperfect tense is long, (as we should express it,) and pronounced long, both in Italian verse and prose; whereas the Florentines make it short, pronouncing *amavāmo amāvămo.* Moreover it would be endless to cite misconstructions and misconjugations allowed in the *Tuscan* and rejected in the *Italian.*

So much for modifications of the Tuscan base; but you will always keep in recollection its wider admission of foreign graces. This character of the order, or rather this disposition to receive any character, renders the Italian an engine applicable to all purposes in the hands of those who know how to wield it; and the English notion of this language, which sees in it only a vehicle for pathetic or amatory verse, appears to me founded upon a very superficial view of the subject. This magnificent machine may be better compared to an organ, which has all the sources of harmony within itself; from the trumpet-stop to the flageolet. Take, as a proof, two authors, who have both graced the

language in which they wrote, and both exhibited the most singular contrast of powers: I mean *Alfieri* and *Metastasio*. Have we not here the trumpet and the flute?

But the Italian is not only susceptible of the apparently contradictory qualities of softness and strength; it is capable of uniting principles more substantially opposite; it not only hardens and melts, but contracts or dilates as it is moulded by the artist. Our critics at home are very severe upon the diffusive character of the Italian *prosers*, yet it would be impossible for any language with which I am acquainted, to produce a more extraordinary model of vigour and compression than is to be found in the translation of Tacitus by *Davanzati*. If however it is objected to me, that, judging him by the principles I have myself laid down, this author wrote rather in Florentine * than in Italian, dealing largely

* I cannot perhaps bring this distinction better home to the understanding of a reader not acquainted with the subject of controversy, than by citing an observation of *Monti:* He says that the "Jerusalem Delivered" of Tasso might be as well translated from *Italian* into *Florentine* (add, into any given subdivision of Tuscan) as into any other dialect of the peninsula. Indeed many works might be cited as written in pure Florentine, as the *Teatro Antico Fiorentino*, the *Canti Carnascialeschi*, &c.

in words and phrases that are unintelligible out of Florence, I will take another writer, who equally illustrates my position, I mean Machiavel, as severe and concise as *Davanzati*. I press him into my service, though inlisted on the other side of the question; for *he* cannot surely be said to write in *Florentine*, who has rejected all local modes of speech, and is intelligible to to every one who can read *Italian*. For it is singular that, whilst this author insists the language under consideration should be called *Florentine*, I should cite his writings as models of the purest Italian. He seems to be himself aware of the contradiction, which exists between the fact he contends for, and the tone of his and almost all other literary works; for he confesses that the written language of Italy differs considerably from that of Florence; but, by way of obviating the deduction, says, "Is not this the case every where, and does not the literary necessarily differ from the colloquial language?" The obvious answer to this would be another question, "In what degree?" for on this every thing depends. Thus the French or English, as spoken, differs from itself as written; but this distinction does not consist in any essential change. No new elements are introduced into the written language: the difference is seen in

superiority of elegance and arrangement. The English do not recur to Scotland, nor the French to *Provence* for words and phraseology. The Italian, on the contrary, is almost unlimited in his range. It is hence, perhaps, that some of the few lights of the language have shot their rays from spots where it was unknown, but as Latin is in Hungary. This is equally true of the present as of former ages, and you will recollect that our friend *Ugo Foscolo*, to whom I should give the first place amongst the modern Italians, is, strictly speaking, a Venetian creole.* But in discussing the merits of the Italian, the questions of name and character are necessarily getting continually involved; I shall disentangle my skein and keep it clear as long as I can.

Speaking of the genius of the Italian; I said that it was an engine applicable to all purposes. Yet though this instrument, "govern its ventages but rightly, will discourse most eloquent music;" like other weapons of the art, it makes woeful discord in the hands of him who is not perfect in its management. This is so difficult, that few French or English, with the exception

* Of Venetian origin, but a native of Zante.

of *Menage*, *Milton* and *Mathias*, who, I suppose, triumphed in the spirit of alliteration, have ever cultivated it with success. But let us look to the peninsula itself, to Tuscany,* if you will, or indeed to the very spot from which I date, as affording the best illustration of the truth of my position. *Goldoni* was, as every one knows, born a Venetian. As such, he was necessarily educated in the study of the Italian, which, as I have already said, is the written language of the whole peninsula, and in which he himself wrote about forty volumes in octavo: he passed moreover six years of his life in Tuscany: yet with all his exercise and all his advantages he never arrived at composing in Italian with force, purity, or precision. This man went to France, and a trifling anecdote† which he has given of himself, shews how little he then knew of the language of the country to which he was bound. Yet a few years

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* I should say that the present Tuscan school was the worst in the peninsula.

† He tells us that on his voyage to some southern port of France, his fear was increased during a gale of wind by a Frenchman's exclaiming *Voilà!* on the approach of every heavy sea. This he imagined was an injunction to make more sail, confounding *vela* with *voilà*. See his Memoirs.

after this we find him writing a comedy in French,* which was received with applause; and the language of which has, I believe, escaped criticism.

But, to rise a little higher in the scale than poor *Goldoni*, and cite one, who, unlike him, *was* eminently successful in point of style, I mean the author of *Galateo:* by what sacrifices was this perfection purchased? We are told, if my recollection serves me, that he employed thirty or forty years in its composition. Now is life long enough to bestow such a space of time, on what might be comprized in a moderate sized duodecimo?

I have cited this work; since, though it is a model of Italian elegance, there is nothing in the matter (which I have just measured) that need have cost an hour's thought to the composer.

But in what, it may be asked, consists the difficulty of Italian composition? In the first place, I should say in the choice of terms, almost all marked by some indescribable difference, the abundance of which, in itself, puzzles and confounds—above all, in the exercise of the right

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* *Le Bourreau bienfaisant.*

of importing foreign terms, the trade in which cannot absolutely be called free, but requires considerable exertion of judgment. Nor does it in deed consist only in the selection of materials; it lies in the very architecture of the language, the structure of its sentences being schemed on distinct principles from those of the other tongues of Europe. In this country a man fagots his notions as they fall, content if each bundle is properly secured. The binder thinks this is done, if no link be wanting in his chain of reasoning: little attention is paid to the rest, as is witnessed by the *Syris* of Bishop Berkley. His ascent by a long flight of easy steps from tar-water to the Trinity is perhaps the happiest specimen of subtle but well connected reasoning which exists; yet the more mechanical part of the performance, however esteemed by us, would disgust the Italian workman, who must consider it as coarsely wrought, in comparison of his own models of exact and delicate execution. *His* mode of composing may be compared to the process of dove-tailing. Add that each sentence is blended into that which follows, with such a nice gradation of shade, that the aid of stops may be considered as unnecessary in a well written Italian work. Hence it is that foreigners who attempt this language, if they

succeed in the outline, rarely succeed in giving it the *chiar' oscuro* which it requires.

I am sensible that these observations may sound extravagant to the French or English; who consider Italian as of easy acquisition. I cannot perhaps better illustrate the cause of this popular mistake and the real state of the fact, than by citing a comparison made use of to me at a time when I shared the general delusion, by an Italian who (no common occurrence) was intimately acquainted with his own language. "This," he said, "might be likened to a coquette, from whom it was easy to obtain a kind look, a squeeze of the hand, or a smile, but with whom there was no going farther." It is now six years since I heard this comparison, and every succeeding year has more deeply impressed me with a conviction of its truth.

We have indeed a crowd of witnesses to this point in the host of Italian writers, who have failed in their pursuit. To descend to our own times; how very few have succeeded in it? These write in a colloquial jargon, replete with provincial gibberish and Gallicisms; while a yet more powerful party flies at higher game, and goes to the thirteenth century in search of an antiquated phraseology, which is become half unintelligible to the present. This last may be

considered as the prevailing folly of the day, though it should seem to be the least explicable.

That a people should neglect or adulterate their own language is sufficiently intelligible, and referable to those very common motives, ignorance and laziness: but the causes which should have incited them to a contrary and very troublesome pursuit are not equally apparent. While, on the other hand, the inconveniences which must result from this pedantic passion might, one should think, have been obvious to any but the besotted sect of the *trecentisti*. *Algarotti*, with great reason, attacks the folly of his countrymen for recurring to the French for military terms, where exact equivalents are to be found in Italian. But this argument will not carry far, since it will not of course bear upon sciences either unknown, or imperfectly cultivated, at the time the Italian was supposed to have been perfectioned. And are new terms in *natural history* or *geology* to be excluded, because these studies were unknown to the writers of the thirteenth century? who, if they had found or distinguished feldspar or a mammoth's bones amongst the Alps, would have called the first a sort of a stone, and the second a sort of a beast. Yet, notwithstanding

the absurdity of its tenets, this sect, like others, has increased, deriving nourishment from its own extravagances; though there have not been wanting men of judgment to expose them.

Having pointed out the difficulties of this language and the extravagances of those who have written in it, let us ascend to the first great cause which has led them astray. In all cases where art is greatly predominant, art is necessarily apt to degenerate into affectation. An Englishman (to take the first-turn metaphor) writes very much as he rides. He gets on horseback how he can, and being somehow or other shaken into his seat, goes straight forward to his object, while the Italian is more anxious to shew his grace than to get to his journey's end. His seat indeed is strong, his posture is elegant, and the animal he bestrides is perhaps obedient to his will; but after all, all is but vanity, and, nine times out of ten, the object is mere caper and caracole.

I ought, however, when enlarging on the powers of this language, to have made some *necessary* exceptions. As an *ideal* language and having no precise standard of idiomatic phraseology, it must (however applicable to other subjects) fail in those of familiar humour, and it is

therefore an unfitting vehicle for comedy. Various causes* have been assigned for the failure of this amongst a people which appears peculiarly fitted for its cultivation. Various others might be alleged with equal plausibility: but the main and effectual bar to its success appears to me to be founded in what I have adduced. For comedy is to be judged by the many, and can only be thoroughly intelligible to them, by dealing in a phraseology which is in common currency, and on which, custom has stamped a certain and recognized sense. Hence what is by us called idiom, serves in all the more ordinary purposes of literature, as coin in the smaller and more familiar intercourse of trade.

But here circumstances render the currency of a common specie impossible, at least with any equality of exchange. For suppose the Tuscan to have been adopted, or (to give more force to my argument) something less abstract, as the Florentine; the *riboboli Fiorentini* † might excite much merriment amidst the frequenters of the *Mercato vecchio*, without perhaps

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* Many of these are merely second causes, such as the bad composition of the theatrical corps, their faulty declamation, &c. &c. &c.

† Proverbial modes of diction peculiar to Florence.

being fully felt by those of the *Mercato nuovo;** and the humour would, at any rate, be considered as vulgar, by all the educated of Florence itself: for it is a nice point in all languages to steer between familiarity and vulgarity, and a thousand inelegancies of diction have perhaps no fault in themselves, being mere vulgarities of convention; held vulgar, because they are only common in an inferior class of society. Thus to *ride in a coach* is voted vulgar in English, and *pincer l'harpe* is, as I am told, considered so in French: but if idiomatic phraseology is left wholly to the people, it must, upon this principle, become wholly vulgar. But this would be the smallest part of the evil: this style of diction, perhaps voted vulgar in Florence itself, would not be at all intelligible without her walls. As a simple proof, open any volume

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* The Florentine, itself, is subdivided by the learned into two dialects, to wit, that of the *mercato vecchio* and the *mercato nuovo;* but a lower Florentine once told me, that the people acknowledge others, (I think four,) assigning a separate one to each of the parishes of the *Camaldoli.*

There is, perhaps, more than one mode of speech current in our own monstrous metropolis, but I do not think any lower Londoner would say, he recognized different dialects in Wapping and Westminster.

of the *Teatro Comico Fiorentino*, and you, who know the written language of Italy, will, I think, be continually at fault. Nor would a foreigner only find difficulties; for an accomplished Italian might be often aground. The comic authors therefore, writing for all Italy, have necessarily adopted a language which is common to the peninsula; but this, as I have already mentioned, is for other reasons insufficient to their end.

For the same reason that Italian is insufficient to the ends of the stage, I should also say it was naturally, though not necessarily ill adapted to the purposes of business; it might even be said to those of conversation which requires precision. Because, as there is no living standard to refer to, and the Italians, considered generally, are not a reading nation, and so do not seek this standard in books, the majority of them never learn the full value and force of words. When they are therefore ignorant of the right one, they either seek its equivalent in their own provincial dialect or supply its want by a gallicism or a *periphrasis*. The consequences of this, in the interchange of what I will call metaphysical terms, are easily conceived: but the evil does not stop here; for, from the want of any

small recognized coin, if ideas are not exchanged in the provincial currency of the place, the thing itself may be said to be given instead of its symbol. As a proof of this, as much within your reach as mine, look out *shutters* in Baretti's Dictionary, and you will find them described, not translated in Italian: that is, not the single word given, which is their equivalent in that language, but a regular definition, as *finestra di legno al di fuori, o al di dentro di quella di vetro,* all which might have been signified in the single word *imposta.* Ask, on the other hand, another, (as a Venetian, for instance,) what is Italian for *shutters,* and he will tell you *scuri.* Imagine then these two principles widely acted upon; that is, a dozen people dealing in definitions instead of equivalents, or playing at cross-purposes, by using terms to which different parts of the company annex either a different value, or no value at all. To offer you also written evidence of my second assertion, look at the Italian newspapers, and I will venture to maintain that, from Turin to Naples, you will not find one but what is filled with provincialisms, unintelligible but for the assistance of the context.

Having balanced the beauties and defects of the Italian, let us now look to the mine that has

furnished the ore, of which, though refined and amalgamated with other metals, it has been principally composed.

Of all living, inartificial tongues, the Tuscan, or (to take hold of something more palpable) the Florentine, is the most poetical and picturesque. But it is rarely that foreigners fish deep enough to find its pearls, for these are only to be collected amongst the lowest orders of the people. The upper ranks of Florence, who do not think themselves under the necessity of studying Italian grammatically, yet seek to assimilate their tone to that of the rest of Italy, make a miserable medley, and are perhaps the worst models of speech in the peninsula. The people, on the contrary, are content, as Mr. Whistlecraft says,

"To talk as their good mothers us'd to teach,"

that is, in the very pith and poetry of *Boccaccio*. I mean of course his phraseology, and do not extend my observation to the elegant, but laboured construction of his sentences,*

"Which neither is, nor was, nor e'er could be"

* *Boccaccio* is considered by *Baretti* as one of the great corrupters of the Italian school, and as having been of as pestilent example in literature as in morals. Without adopting the violence of this kill-cow critic, (*Aristarco Scannabue*, as he

the natural order of conversation or composition in any country or age. It would, least of all, be so in Florence, the dialect of which is remarkable for the absence of art, and is indebted for this to its peculiar character.

It has been often remarked that the language of savages and hunters, &c. is replete with picture. We may say also (for the same reason) that our sailors never speak but in metaphor. They talk of the wind "*coming in spiteful puffs, of pulling against a heart-breaking stream,* and of *an iron-bound coast, &c.*" If they would tell you that the tide begins to abate of its force, they say that *the tide is grown an old man.*— But I am insisting upon what is, I believe, generally acknowledged. Another thing, however, *not* generally recognized, is, equally true; namely, that not only the language of the description of men I have specified, is peculiarly picturesque, but that the speech of the lower orders is always more so than that of the upper— that those who are yclept "base and mechanical," have their imagery, and that in all countries, the

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justly styles himself,) there is, I believe, truth in his accusation. But the style of Boccaccio is exquisite—granted; and so is Lord Bacon's; yet few, I suppose, would propose the chancellor as a model.

language of polished society (probably from their habits of abstraction) is that which is most deficient in vigour and originality: Thus, whilst the gentleman drones out his common-place modes of speech, the journeyman distiller talks almost in the tone of Dante, of a *silent spirit*, (meaning a tasteless one,) the barber, of a razor's *cutting sweet*,* and the labourer, of its being *cruel cold*. The Florentines, however, give in to this style of speech more than any other people, and put passion, life, and figure into every thing they say. I recollect asking my way of one to a particular house, and he told me to go straight forwards to the bottom of the street, and *it would tumble on my head*. My servant, who, I believe, I have already said, was of the same city, appearing not to comprehend some directions I was giving him, I asked him if he understood me; he answered "Yes, for I always spoke *in relief*." (CHÈ PARLAVA SEMPRE SCOLPITO.) Another Florentine, describing to me an accident which had happened to a coach, the horses of which had broken loose from their traces, leaving the carriage to roll down a hill

* A carpenter will even christen a chissel or saw which cuts clean, "sweet-lips."

by itself, observed, in the course of his story, "*Allorchè capitò in fondo, dove era più docile a fermarsi*"—Compare this with Virgil's

neque audit currus habenas,

and decide which is the most poetical.

This figurative mode of expression is, of course, in a great measure rubbed smooth by the polish which the language has received in being ground into Italian.

But this is not the only beauty which has been sacrificed. Thus one characteristic has not generally been transferred into the artificial language which must appear most precious in the eyes of an Englishman—I mean a brevity of expression, which is, I think, as remarkable as that which distinguishes his own vernacular tongue; the Florentines coining a verb out of every noun, and thus condensing into one word what would otherwise cost three. As an instance of how far this is carried, I should mention that, asking my servant once whether he was comfortable on the coach-box, he answered me that he was very well off, adding "*chè quì si moleggia*"—"for here one springs it."

Passing to other modifications of the Tuscan, more particularly to corrected irregularities of grammar, I am not even sure that *these* have not

been somewhat rashly dealt with; for such, though unaccompanied by any specific force or elegance, sometimes give the same wild grace to language which neglect does to female beauty, and are not, therefore, to be lightly lopt away or reformed. But there is yet another grammatical irregularity which is deserving of closer consideration—I mean such as gives force to expression, and is moreover often indicative of national character and habits. Thus a thorough-paced Florentine, announcing to another his intention of dining with you, would, I believe, say, "*Vado a pranzo in casa* IL *Signor Hallam;*" but if he was speaking of your house in any other way than that indicative of frequenting it, as of its being well or ill built, &c. he would say "*La casa* DEL *Signor Hallam*—" This exemption of the genitive from inflection in the first instance, is a sort of domestication of it, which pleases me much. Take, as a specimen of another species of irregularity, the omission of the definite article before certain words, as *Arno;* since his dear river is so familiar to the Florentine, that it becomes to him as a living person. Something of this kind is to be found in Greek, and in English, for we have still left us some stray ungrammatical graces which have escaped those Spar-

tacuses Messrs. Lowth and Blair.* Thus, in Greek, the definite article is not, I believe, attached to the word μεσικὴ, and in English *we*

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* These persons may be considered as having attempted to *latinize* a language whose genius is hostile to the attempt—to reduce it to something like the principles of Italian—to divest it of its peculiar physiognomy, and shape all the anomalies which I have mentioned, to a rigorous standard of analogy. The last object appears the most justifiable in theory; yet it would be difficult to produce a more ridiculous effect than that which often results from this attempt at precision; and I shall cite a sentence of Mr. Blair's, made absurd by a single monosyllable, inserted upon the principle of grammatical analogy. "If *at* sometimes he falls much below himself, at other times he rises above every poet of the ancient or modern world."—*Character of Milton.*

I may, perhaps, at first sight, appear inconsistent, when I protest against the conversion of *English* into *British*, after contending that *Tuscan* was to be generalized into *Italian*. But I consider every language as having a character of its own, which ought not to be forced out of its bias. Now the language of the peninsula took from its birth the bent, in which I contend it should be indulged; while the English is radically vernacular. If I am asked whether I would, therefore, have it run wild, I say "No;" but I would not have it unnecessarily grafted from a foreign stock, or twisted and tortured out of its natural growth. In short I would have men consider their language like the other institutions of their ancestors, in a religious, but not superstitious spirit of reverence.

leave it out before parliament; omissions which prove how much these two words were, or are familiarized both to Greeks and English, and which give a characteristic cast to the national language of both. But all such features have been obliterated in the process I have described.

To sum up, as far as I have gone, the contents of this long letter, without reference to their order, I should say then that Italian was not Tuscan, though in great part fashioned out of it; that, without pretending to determine on which side the scale inclines upon the whole, it may be averred that many beauties have been sacrificed, and many accessions received in the process; that the latter, however, are greater in theory than in practice; and that the chase of *the beautiful ideal* has, in a vast variety of cases, led Italian authors out of the right road, dazzled them with false lights, and lost them in the pursuit of an *ignis fatuus*.

It is not, however, the only charge against an ideal language that it is apt to adopt a tawdry and diffusive character of expression; it often assumes a fantastic one, eschewing what is real as necessarily ignoble. Thus I remember once objecting to an Italian translator of Shakspeare, that he had deviated essentially from his original, in what he put into the mouth of one of the sen-

tinels in Hamlet, *viz.* of "not an insect having stirred," whereas he says in the English, that "not a MOUSE had stirred." But he overruled my objection by the remark, that such illustrations were too mean for the Italian stage.* I next reproached him with having substituted a fillet *(benda)* for the handkerchief in the tragedy of Othello, observing that the handkerchief was a more probable means of mischief than the fillet, and that, according to my northern notions, the very familiarity of the instrument produced effect, as contrasted with the powerful passions which it put in motion. Here, however, he again turned my battery by informing me that the word handkerchief could not be used in Italian poetry. And though this might be considered as an absurd refinement by a *Pindemonte* or a *Foscolo*, it is, I am persuaded, a principle which would influence a host of peninsular purists.

Having at length done with the Italian, and Italian ideal, I am inclined to throw out a few speculations on the character of the parent tongue, which, I believe, was influenced by

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* The poets of another age were of another opinion. Ariosto makes the Orc's wife say of him,

"Che sente fin a un *topo* che sia in casa."

the same circumstances as concurred in the formation of its offspring. To put this as shortly as I can, that the Latin, cultivated by the Romans, was no more the *Latin* spoken in *Latium* than modern Italian is the Italian which is spoken in Tuscany. This notion is not my own; and I recollect thinking it a far-fetched conjecture when it was broached to me. Some school-boy recollections, however, carried me back to my Quintilian; and I found in this hint a key to passages which were before unintelligible. Indeed without it, how can we well explain the difficulty which he says there was in teaching children *Latin* with precision? A month's residence in modern Florence might illustrate his position.

The natives of that city, as I have already said, speak their own vernacular with spirit, where they do not seek to assimilate their speech to that of the rest of Italy; but, for the want of having studied this last critically, they uniformly massacre it in the attempt. A more unquestionable confirmation of the opinion I have thrown out may, however, perhaps be found in the author I have just cited. I allude to a passage which seems to prove the legality of a naturalization of provincial phrases. I have already said something on this point incidentally

to another subject,* and have cited various authorities, but I shall now confine myself to Quintilian. Speaking of the *patavinity* of Livy, he says, (I quote from very distant recollection,) "if it can be fairly objected to an author, that he has introduced modes of speech from any of the provinces of Italy."

In fine, that the Latin of the learned (or at least what, according to Quintilian, ought to have been the Latin of the learned) was as much an ideal language as its daughter the Italian, seems clear to me; but what was the language of *the people* can hardly be precisely ascertained. It may however admit a doubt whether it came as near the *lingua aulica* of those days, as the Tuscan does to the modern Italian.

But since we are upon this subject, I cannot leave untouched the speculations of Maffei and some others, who contend they *have* made out the features of the ancient *vulgar tongue* of Rome in the modern Italian which, according to them, is a mere continuation of it, having only undergone such changes as time must necessarily introduce. These are wide words; let us see if

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* In the preceding letter, on the supposed Venetianisms of Catullus, &c.

we can come to any thing like a closer conclusion, reasoning from the data which are left to us.

One great and singular point of resemblance there certainly is between the Italian and what I will call the ancient, as well as vulgar, Latin, if we may judge from rustic inscriptions. The thing I allude to is the use, as a nominative, of what, in good Latin, became the ablative case. Thus we find in these *anim*o used instead of *anim*us, &c. It may be seen in *Lanzi's Saggio di Lingua Etrusca*, that the great grandfathers of the Catos and Cetheguses were not worth a nominative, the ablative serving as such when required; and even when a later age adopted the refinement of setting up a nominative it did not pass current with the people. This was natural; for it may be remarked, that in all countries, imperfections of speech linger amongst the less polished orders of society.

But some yet more material points of resemblance have been discovered. Many elementary Italian words, considered by some as the influx of later and barbarous times, have been traced to the Latin source: these may be said to have been for a long while borne to the bottom, and to have risen again to the surface, amid the roll and revolutions of the stream. Some such have

been cited from Plautus, by *Monti*, in his late philological work, as *casa*, *testa*, *focus*, *bellus*, and others, which, though grammatically moulded by the poet, were, it should seem, as popularly used, as their modern Italian derivatives, and in substitution for classical terms; as *casa* instead of DOMUS, *focus* instead of IGNIS, *testa* instead of CAPUT, and *bellus* instead of PULCHER.

It is not, however, enough to point out particular features of resemblance, where general likeness is wanting; and it may be contended, that the vulgar Latin, though there might be single points of resemblance, differed *radically* from the modern Italian. I doubt whether we know enough of it, to decide whether this be true or not; as all our conjectures must be drawn on this point from the written and not the popular tongue of ancient Italy: yet it would not perhaps be a rash assertion that there was some tendency even in the written towards the present speech of the peninsula.

Thus, the auxiliary verbs, considered as the strongest marks of distinction betwixt the dead and living languages, may yet be traced, though faintly, in the ancient written Latin, and it does not appear a far-fetched conjecture, that their use should have been more frequent in the *vulgar*. For the passion of the people

for such useful implements and of such easy management, is notorious in modern Europe,* and was for the same reason probably equally general amongst the ancient inhabitants of Latium. It does not seem to me, therefore, that these seeds could have lain dormant for ages, and only have sprung and sprouted in the corruption of the language.

I know, however, it is thought by many, that the auxiliary verbs, now general in all the languages of Europe, were introduced by the barbarians who inundated it. That they existed in *their* variety of jargons there is no doubt, but I believe they sprung spontaneously both in Greek and Latin, and grew without a graft.

Languages may indeed be compared to machinery, which is always complicated in the beginning, each part being adapted to one only

* Thus to take my proofs from places most present to my observation or recollection—The Venetian has only the indefinite perfect in his language, always (however perfectly completed the action may be) making use of the auxiliary verb to rig out a jury-tense. Ex. gr. He says "SON *andà*," and has no equivalent for the Italian *Andai*. In the same way the Hampshire-man says "I *did* go;" and never, "I went," always supposing him to be unsophisticated.

purpose: In the course of time, things are simplified, and one engine is made applicable to many. The same process may be detected in all languages. The ancient Greek, for instance, had a dual or definite plural, as well as an indefinite one; the Otaheitans, we are told, refining on this principle, have a quintal, comprizing four of these ingenious inconveniences. But the Greeks soon found their dual useless; and the Otaheitans, as they advance in civilization, will probably make a similar discovery. The Arab has, according to report, 100 names for a camel, and the Gaël about as many for a mountain. These are not synonymes, but different shades of language. Accordingly the Gaël, who has learned English, finds it is less troublesome to use epithets, each of which may serve many substantives, than to distinguish many substantives by some mark which is exclusively peculiar to each.

The *auxiliaries* are of the nature of these examples. It is more troublesome to twist verbs into a multiplicity of inflections, each being a fixed appendage to its principle, than to call in the aid of *shall*, *will*, and *have*, who are scrubs of all work, and can be tacked to any verb which advertizes for a tense.

The natural explanation of all this seems

to be that the power of abstracting is one of man's later acquisitions, and it is therefore in a late stage of society that this takes place. But when we look back to *ancient languages* with attention, we may see that the principle of auxiliary verbs has always existed, and if we examine *living ones*, shall detect it in endeavouring to extend itself; even where its progress may have escaped general observation. Ask, for instance, an Italian grammarian how many auxiliary verbs he acknowledges, and he will tell you, two only. Yet it might easily be shewn that others have made good their pretensions to be considered as signs, *de facto*, if not *de jure*. Ex. gr. The *Romaic* θα or θελω and *English Will* have their equivalent in his language, as, *Vuol piovere*, it *will* rain; *Voglio dire l'animo mio*, I *will* speak my mind, &c. or the same sign stands in the place of *shall*, as, *Vogliamo andare?* *Shall* we go?

Wide as is the range which I have taken through the birth, parentage, and education of the Italian, I have hitherto neglected one point; I mean its pronunciation; and I am the less inclined to leave it untouched, as it throws some additional light upon the character of the language, and will come in aid of what I have already advanced: for this too is, in the strictest

sense of the word, *ideal*; but as I do not want you to take the assertion on trust, you may try its truth by chasing Italian pronunciation through every place where it has left an echo. Can that of Florence, for instance, be taken as a standard?—Certainly not: for it is proverbially ridiculed for its harsh and guttural sounds. Can that of any other city then in the dukedom?—I still answer "No; not even Sienna." Because, all over Tuscany, the *ci* is uttered in a way which is not esteemed correct by the rest of Italy, and because the diphthongal vowels are sounded *there*, as no where else; that is to say, one of them is omitted; and words composed as *fuoco*, &c. are pronounced as if they were written *foco*, &c. Where then shall we look for the polar star which is to determine our course? I recollect reading in *Veneroni's* Grammar that it is to be found at Rome, as is inferred from the proverb of *Lingua Toscana in bocca Romana*; and the currency this has acquired, made me, notwithstanding a protest of *Baretti's*, honour it without question or doubt. I, however, hesitated on hearing the Roman *cantilena*; (a vile effeminate drawl,) and set myself to inquire of what *firm* it really was. I may have searched ill; but I have vainly rummaged for it in all the books which concern this lan-

guage, and every thing, and every saying which relates to it. I, at length, looked a little more closely to my reporter, and finding his Grammar by no means correct, inquired into his qualifications. The result was, that he was a Frenchman; I forget his name; but recollect being told he had no pretension to that of *Veneroni*, which was apparently assumed merely to sell his book, he having no sort of connection with Italy. I therefore take the liberty, till some one shall affirm the thing on some better authority, to consider the proverb of *Lingua Toscana in bocca Romana* as a lie to which rhyme has given currency.

What then, you will say, is to be considered as the rule of pronunciation? I answer, that the rules of declamation, as well as those of composition, are to be sought in different provinces, and these will form in their complex some imaginary model of excellence.

I have woven my web, which I fear you may find ill-spun; but I will not quarrel with you, though, as Hamlet says, you should think "my words much too light for the *bore* of the matter."

LETTER XXXIV.

On the Necessity of Italian to a Traveller—Extraordinary Italian Linguist at Bologna.

Venice, November, 1817.

After having expended so much fire on the Italian language, you will perhaps be inclined to reproach me, for having omitted a point very interesting to the traveller, if not to the *philologist:* to wit, whether a knowledge of this language is necessary to the tourist in Italy. As to this; I should say, that it depends upon the object of the traveller; for, if he merely goes in search of monuments of art and antiquities, he may do very well with no other language but his own; for the Italian is so quick of understanding, that a sign or a look is enough to speak your meaning: and this is not thrown out at random; for I know an instance of an Englishman who travelled over a great part of the peninsula on foot without any knowledge of Italian, or even of French: but if the traveller's views are more extensive, and embrace the

study of manners, Italian is absolutely necessary.

It is to be premised, in the first place, that though French is very general in Italy, there are many cultivated Italians, who cannot speak it with fluency; and, in the next place, that those who *do*, will merely address themselves in it to *you*, while all general conversation is carried on in Italian. But the Italian who *does* speak it becomes a different person, on varying his language. This apparent change of character may be observed in England. Let us suppose a foreigner, a German, for instance, not familiar with French phraseology, to be conversing with an Englishman who *is*, in French. The Englishman, speaking of a dish which pleases him, says " it is a dish to be eat on all fours," or talks of " fatiguing a sallad," or speaking of colours, raves about " the thigh-colour of an agitated nymph."* The foreigner naturally sets him down either for a beast, or a fool; whilst, on the contrary, the man is neither the one nor the other, but merely adapts himself to the idiom of the language in which he speaks. We may therefore infer from what I have stated,

* *Couleur de cuisse de nimfe émue;* a fashionable Parisian tint during the year 1817.

that, let the Italian speak French well or ill, the rational traveller's object in conversing with him is in part defeated; for if he speaks it well, his natural character is seen through a doubtful medium; if ill, it is a fatigue to figure in a duet, where both are out of tune. The second case is by far the most frequent; for languages (though he is a better linguist than the Englishman) are not usually the strong side of the Italian.

But as this country has been fertile in every variety of genius, from that which handles the pencil to that which sweeps the skies with the telescope; so even in this, her least favourite beat, she has produced men who, in early life, have embraced such a circle of languages, as one should hardly imagine three ages would have enabled them to attain. Thus the wonders which are related of one of these, *Pico di Mirandola*, I always considered as fabulous, till I was myself the witness of acquisitions which can scarcely be considered as less extraordinary.

The living *lion* to whom I allude is the Signor *Mezzofanti*, of Bologna, who, when I saw him, though he was only thirty-six years old, read twenty and conversed in eighteen languages. This is the least marvellous part of the story; he spoke all these fluently, and those, of which I could judge, with the most extraordinary pre-

cision. I had the pleasure of dining in his company formerly in the house of a Bolognese lady, at whose table a German officer declared that he could not have distinguished him from a German. He passed the whole of the next day with G—— and myself, and G—— told me he should have taken him for an Englishman, who had been some time out of England. A Smyrniote servant, who was with me, bore equal testimony to his skill in other languages, and declared that he might pass for a Greek or a Turk, throughout the dominions of the Grand Signior. But what most surprized me was his accuracy; for during long and repeated conversations in English, he never once misapplied the *sign* of a tense, that fearful stumbling-block to Scotch and Irish, in whose writings there is almost always to be found some abuse of these indefinable niceties.

The marvel was, if possible, rendered more marvellous by this gentleman's accomplishments and information, things rare in linguists, who generally mistake the means for the end. It ought also to be stated, that his various acquisitions had been all made in Bologna, from which, when I saw him, he had never wandered above thirty miles.

LETTER XXXV.

Conduct of the Imperial Government at Venice.

Venice, November, 1817.

We are told that on Louis XIV. expressing, when a child, his admiration at the despotic power possessed by the Turkish sultans, one of his courtiers had the honesty to draw his attention to the number of those who had perished by the bowstring. But it is a vulgar view of the subject to imagine that absolute princes are subjected to no heavier penalty. A miserable end is bad, but a miserable life is yet worse. I call *his* a miserable life, who is deprived of the exercise of free-will, while he is seated beneath the shadow of power. Amongst the strange contradictions which are to be found in despotic governments, the theory and practice of which are generally at variance, this is, I believe, one of the most ordinary. I do not, however, mean to say that there have not existed in different ages and different countries absolute monarchs of extraordinary mind and talents, who have

been able to guide or stem opinion, and who have really reigned: but I speak of what I believe to be the case in a great majority of instances. This is easily accounted for, since despotism cannot rest upon its own base. Despotic monarchs, therefore, seek as narrow a one for it as possible, and plant it (where they do not find this done to their hand) upon the prejudices of the people. Hence in such states there is a constant reciprocation of slavery, through every link of the chain which binds empire together. As a proof; who are more enslaved to established usages than the Emperors of China and Morocco? The Emperor of China may indeed cane his mandarins, and the Emperor of Morocco may behead his people at pleasure; but should either attempt any liberal or useful reform, he would be instantly hurled from his throne. We may say that all monarchy is built upon opinion. Constitutional kings in mixed monarchies, which are rationally constituted, generally speaking have to defer to the enlightened part of the public. Absolute monarchs are more usually the tools of the ignorant and *hypocritical.* To a European instance; the Emperor of Austria is sometimes stigmatized in Italy as a wayward tyrant, at once foolish and faithless, professing great religion and morality,

and violating, in practice, every precept of God and man. The following notice may serve to shew how far these accusations are founded in truth, and how far he is a willing instrument in perpetrating the mischief which is attributed to him. The whole of Italy rung with the gracious professions which he made to his new subjects on visiting his Italian states; of his promise to abolish provincial custom-houses, to diminish the burdens under which his subjects were groaning, *&c. &c. &c.* Princes, however, too often find a dispensation from these sort of promises in the necessities of the state, and the circumstances of the times. We will therefore pass by these and their non-performance, and look to others of a different description, for the violation of which it would be difficult to find other excuse than that which serves as a text to my letter.

When the Emperor visited Venice in 1815, he inspected in person all the public institutions, churches, hospitals, and prisons. On his visiting the prison of the *Riva degli Schiavoni*, the keeper informed him of whatever was interesting in the history of those confined in it, or the immediate cause of their imprisonment. Amongst others he pointed out two boys, the eldest of whom was not above fifteen years old, and who, by the French laws, which remained

in force, had been sentenced to five years' imprisonment for stealing some fruit, observing that two years of that period had already elapsed; and he ventured to suggest, in a case where the punishment was so evidently disproportioned to the offence, his Imperial Majesty would find a happy occasion for exercising his mercy. He made the reply, which he vouchsafed to every petition which was presented him, of *Sarà fatto*;* but never redeemed his promise, either in this or in the innumerable other occasions, where he had pledged it, and always in the same form of words. During his six weeks' stay at Venice, he was positively besieged by suppliants, and one of those about him has reported, that the number of their petitions amounted to 40,000; all which were received with the invariable answer of *Sarà fatta*, yet I have been assured, that no instance is known of a single promise having been fulfilled. This statement, though made by one whose evidence would appear unexceptionable, must, I think, when tried by arithmetic, be considered as exaggerated; for you will observe that, allowing this imperial assurance-machine to have been at work for only twelve hours out of the four and

* It shall be done.

twenty, it would have delivered about a lie a second, a power that appears almost incredible. But allowing this statement to be overcharged, it is universally agreed that numerous petitions were graciously received, and compliance promised, but in no one known instance performed.

Are we to attribute this conduct to forgetfulness—to indifference? I have, without affectation, too good an opinion of the Emperor's intentions, to accuse him of what may be considered as *crimes* in a sovereign. All is to be attributed to his not being a free agent; but if a doubt could remain on this subject the following anecdote will, I think, remove it.

An officer who had, by his services, arrived at the rank of captain in the French navy, but who had only been able to obtain a lieutenant's commission in the Austrian service, on the Imperialists taking possession of Venice, petitioned the Emperor to be re-instated in his original rank. His prayer was backed by the commandant of the Austrian marine, who confirmed the statement of his claims, and strongly recommended him as a meritorious officer. The Emperor said that he considered his case as a very hard one, and would himself transmit it to the Aulic Chamber, to whom he would enjoin

his restoration to the rank he had formerly filled. The officer relied upon the word of his sovereign, but, after some weeks, the commandant of the marine received a letter from the Aulic Council, returning the petition in question, and stating that the petitioner was at liberty to quit the Imperial service, if he did not think proper to hold such a commission as they had been pleased to assign him; that they were astonished at the general's presuming to support such a document, knowing, as he must have done, their sentiments from the existence of the commission itself. They recommended to him, moreover, not to be guilty of a similar act of indiscretion in future; as, in such case, they could not consider him as longer worthy of the high situation entrusted to his charge.

But this man, *some* will say, was a former servant of France, and was, as such, entitled to no better measure than that which he received. I have a case in point for such as feel or reason in this manner. A Venetian gentleman, governor of the fortress of the *Lido*, in pursuance of orders, fired upon, and repulsed a French brig, which was attempting to enter the port, a few days before the *revolutionisement* of Venice. Buonaparte insisted on his punishment, and he was moreover excluded from all future com-

mand during the new system of things. This man, reduced to poverty, sought grace at the feet of the Emperor, who assured him of his protection and assistance.—He died neglected and in misery, and one of his sons is now employed in piecing the tesselated pavement in the church of St. Mark!

It will not be out of its place to remark here, that France, though an aggressor in the beginning, was perhaps, in the last instance, justified in her hostilities to Venice, which that power had provoked by a diversion favourable to *Austria*.

The treatment of this man, independently of the object in confirmation of which I have told the story, may serve to shew the treatment which his Imperial Majesty's Italian subjects are destined to receive, whatever be their claims. But I might say, that every day offers fresh proofs of the hopelessness of these, almost every office being now filled with Germans, from the clerk and corporal to the judge and general, all unacquainted with the language, and unexperienced in the habits, of the country.

This must be considered as a perverse system of policy in any country, but it is most peculiarly mischievous to the interests of its authors in this. The Venetian revolution cast adrift an

immense number of persons, who lived upon the employments of the state. It was hardly to be expected that the beggarly government of Austria should make an adequate provision for them, but it might at least have given employment to hundreds, were it only in the subaltern departments of its innumerable petty establishments. But a more dangerous source of discontent has been opened in all the Austro-Italian provinces by this illiberal system of exclusion. There is a host of needy military adventurers, late in the service of the kingdom of Italy who are now either pining in the inferior ranks of the imperial army, or being too proud to descend in the scale of service, are actually without the means of obtaining their daily bread. These men are, of course, all ripe for revolution, and ready for any chance or change that may present itself. But if the fate of those who have been turned adrift is pitiable, that of many who have remained in the vessel is hardly to be envied, these being put on short allowance, and having scarcely wherewithal to support a miserable existence. In the time of the French a subaltern in the Venetian marine had three franks a day: he has now one and a half.

The Venetians received this paternal treatment at the hands of his Imperial Majesty immediately on returning under his dominion, and indeed have no legal right "to think themselves ill-used;" but the Milanese *have* this melancholy resource. Till lately they enjoyed certain privileges, which they imagined they had ensured by a capitulation,* under which they subjected themselves to their invaders. I am now, however, told that, by the new organisation lately sent to Milan from Vienna, there are only two Italians left in the higher departments of that government.

The Milanese have hitherto confined their revenge to teaching their magpies and jackdaws† to rail upon their ostensible tyrant. But

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* The immediate violation of the most essential article of this might have taught the Milanese how little was to be hoped from its other stipulations.

By the capitulation made in 1815, the Austrians engaged not to enter the city, but to leave a certain circle about it unviolated; in the mean time the infamous murder of *Prina* and the surrender of Paris gave them courage to violate their engagements, and they took military possession of Milan, only two days after having solemnly stipulated to respect it.

† The magpies and jackdaws of Milan saluted the Emperor, on his last visit, with the cry of "*Va via Checco*," or, "Get

will their rage always find so innocent a vent? God grant it may! for I see nothing that this miserable country could hope from a revolution.

If the Milanese, however, have not reaped the benefits they expected from their capitulation, they have gained something by shewing their teeth; for the minor impositions of Milan are at least somewhat milder than at Venice, and, as a simple proof of this, I should state that a letter from Venice to Milan pays much less than one from Milan to Venice, though the road runs nearly on a flat, and no reason can be assigned for the difference.

How much more rational was the system pursued by the French, who, opening the road to all Italians, peculiarly encouraged national talents and worth! I do not believe I exaggerate when I say that, excepting the line of country annexed to France, there was not a Frenchman employed, even as a sub-prefect, in Italy. The only one who held any civil official situation in this city was the director of the post. In military matters it was indeed otherwise; for the commandants in all towns were, I believe,

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away, Frank!" This circumstance was omitted in the official account of his Imperial Majesty's reception.

French; but that Buonaparte should deviate in this particular from his general system, and not choose to part with the staff of power, can hardly be objected to him. In my general horror of his system, (of which I have by no means divested myself,) I could not, at first, understand why he was here preferred to his successor; but I can say, with truth, that on coming to Italy the scales fell from my eyes, and I instantly discerned and acknowledged the justice of the preference shewn to *his* administration by the Italians over that of a race which seems rather Chinese than European.

At least I am not single in these sentiments; for I never yet met with an Englishman, who knew enough of the language of Italy to inform himself of what was passing about him,—I never knew one employed or unemployed,

> ——— "whether whig or tory,
> Whether he went to meeting or to church,"
> *Whistlecraft.*

who did not feel what *I* feel, and generally in a much keener degree than myself.

All the misery which I have thus described as heaped upon Italy is, I repeat, in my firm belief, inflicted by an unwilling instrument.

The Emperor of Austria has the reputation of an amiable private character, and the princes of his house have shewn talent as well as good intentions, whenever they have been unfettered from the gyves of the Aulic Council.

LETTER XXXVI.

Fiscal System of Austria in Italy, &c.

Venice, November, 1817.

I SHALL attempt in my present letter to give you some idea of Austria's *fiscal* administration of these provinces, from which you will judge whether Lombardy has, in this respect, reason to be content with her change of masters. It is but just to state, that the system is not to be exclusively attributed to the head of the sour-crout nations, and that Austria is not to be considered as more weak or tyrannical than her neighbours; who are all, like the emperor, excellent persons in private life, and all scourges of the countries subject to their sway.

But as it would be a useless task to trace this scheme of oppression, through all its variations, I shall give you that of the government of the state from which I write, which is, however, as I have hinted, a little more severe than the other great division of Lombardy, known under the name of the Milanese.

I have already mentioned, incidentally to other

matters, the taxes upon flesh, fowl, fish, flour, &c.; but to give a more comprehensive idea of these, I shall state that every eatable and drinkable is not only taxed, &c. but seized and cessed under whatever various form it may present itself. Thus grain, flour, and bread, pay each a separate impost. It is the same with bull and beef, &c.; and mark, that not an article is brought to the place I date from, no not even a cabbage, but what pays its miserable fraction of a farthing. Such revenue, it is obvious, can only be collected at an expense, which must run away with the profit. But these petty taxes, which are almost unproductive to the government, though grievous in the extreme to the subject, are, to speak familiarly, mere flea-bites in comparison to the other vampire-pulls of the Austrian eagle.

I pass to these more cruel evacuations. The most serious of them, known by the name of *la prediale*, which prevails over Italy, is levied as well on land as on all descriptions of actual and tangible property. These pay 25 per cent. upon their annual produce, that produce being calculated by public appraisers, and estimated according to the valuation made by them, under the French administration. This tax is collected in four even and quarterly payments. There are, in addition to this, what are called extra taxes (*so-*

pra-imposte) which proprietors pay, and which are known by the various denominations of *stradale, communale, reimposta, &c.* The taxes of this latter description have amounted, during the three years of Austrian government, to about 12 per cent. a year. The whole amount, therefore, of these *greater taxes* would be 37 per cent. —always speaking of annual produce.

It is but justice to declare that this appears to me to have been heavier in the time of the French; since, according to the best official information I can obtain, the aggregate produce of their main taxes amounted from 42 to 44 per cent.

The question, however, whether Italy was more severely taxed under the French or Austrians, is not to be determined by this comparison, because the system of frontier custom-houses, such as at present are established at the interval of every few miles, as between Padua and Venice, Vicenza and Padua, though all situated within the same state—this monstrous piece of folly, I say, did not exist under the French, who were cruel task-masters, but not ignorant of their own interest, if careless of that of the people whom they had united to them. We must, therefore, in addition to the 37 per cent. levied by the Austrians, throw in the innume-

rable petty duties levied upon different articles *in transitu.*

It ought, however, to be stated that the next most foolish and iniquitous tax still existing, was even of old Venetian origin, and was preserved by the French, I mean that which bears upon all beasts in life, lump, or leavings, from the wholesale bull which enters the city with horns fixed and tail flying, down to the lowest garbage which is extracted from him when he has laid down his life in the slaughter-house.*

But questions of taxation are not only to be tried by numbers; and the last species of impost which I have described is a striking illustration of this truth. Taxes are, as any child knows, more or less mischievous, not only in proportion

* The smallest piece of entrails belonging to a beast, of whatever condition, pays under a tax, the title of which I copy from an official paper: "*Dazio sugli animali bovini, porcini, pecorini, carni, grassina e minuzzami,*" that is, tax upon beasts; ox, swine, and sheep, flesh, fat, and offal. As this could not touch the countryman who killed his own mutton, another engine was levelled at him under the title of poll-tax, or "*dazio testatico.*" Such was, however, the misery of last year, that this could not be collected. The deficiency was, however, in some way or other to be made up, and a tax upon stamped paper infinitely wider than that of ours, was augmented in proportion to the failure of the poll-tax.

to their extent, but with reference to their nature and their application. Brought to this last test, I should give a decided preference to French economy. Under this, I see the completion of magnificent public works, and the foundation of establishments for the encouragement of art, of fine public roads, and a secure police. On the other side, I see all the sources of wealth cut off from the country where they spring and which they watered, to be diverted into a desert which its inhabitants have not the skill or the activity to fertilize. Thus a striking instance of the mode in which the ancient provinces of Austria are favoured at the expense of her new acquisitions is afforded by her mode of supplying the wants of her armies. These are supplied with all necessaries, where the thing is practicable, out of her hereditary transalpine dominions, though necessarily at a much greater expense; a curious contrast to the conduct of France, who fed and clothed her Gallo-Italian armies entirely with the products of the peninsula.

But to leave all question of the distribution or application of taxes, and to return to that of the amount, under the French and Austrian regimen in Italy; I mean taxes of every kind, whether on land, on articles of consumption, or

duties, &c. &c. &c. *I am assured* by another authority, (my own opinion leans a different way,) that these are so much more oppressive at present, that where French Italy paid thirty millions of francs, Austrian Italy now pays forty. And you will recollect that the Lombard and Venetian states are at least a third less than was the kingdom of Italy. If this fact, which I have heard confidently averred,* be true, the excess of present taxation must arise out of provincial imports and exports: for I cannot be deceived in the statement which I have given you respecting the *prediale*, &c.

Whether the French system of raising a revenue in Italy was more or less nefarious than that of the Austrians, it must be acknowledged that the mode of collecting it, as well as the formation of the main system of taxation, originated with the former. It is scarcely possible

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* Were I to measure these warring statements by the *authority* of the men who furnished them, I should lean rather to this last than that which I have most relied upon. But the account favourable to Austria was given me in detail, and the details seemed consistent with each other. On the other hand, that which spoke most in favour of France, was an assertion unsupported by actual proofs. After all, the accounts are not absolutely inconsistent.

to conceive any thing more monstrous than this mode of collection, which, adopted by the Austrians, remains unmodified and unmitigated to the present hour.

I have already stated that the payment of the *prediale*, &c. is to be made quarterly; the failure of this payment at quarter-day is visited by the mulct of an additional five per cent. if the payment be not made good within the four-and-twenty hours of the day of receipt. This penalty "drinks deep;" but that which awaits further default, to pursue my quotation, "drinks cup and all." For if the tax, together with its penalties, is not paid at the conclusion of the term of fifteen days, (for so much more law is afforded the debtor,) the *receiver* threatens what is called *un' oppignorazione*, in plain English, *a distress*, and this he may levy upon house, lands, or moveables, as he shall think fit. If, notwithstanding this intimation, the tax and penalties are not paid, the distress is actually levied; and this being done, in addition to the tax itself and its penalties, the expenses of the distress are also to be defrayed by the defaulter. If he does not voluntarily defray all these accumulated charges, a *new* distress is levied upon other lands, other houses, and other moveables. Thus, you see, there is an eternal repetition of the Gallico-Italian

scene of Molière, "*che fare?—seignare, purgare, e clysterisare.*" But the matter is not mended, and the old question is renewed of *che fare?*—re-*seignare*, re-*purgare*, *et* re-*clysterizare.**

The distress is now levied according to the mode of the country, that is, the property of the defaulter is put under sequestration, but this *peine forte et dure* does not extort payment. The next step of the *receiver*, under such circumstances, is to send him a "*diffida.*" After this ominous intimation, he proceeds to sell his distrained property by auction, but if the sale of it more than covers the debt, is supposed to return him the overplus. There is still moreover a last hope held out to him; though his property is sold, he has two months good allowed him to recover it, by the payment of the same price at which it was purchased. This is, however, to be considered as scarcely more than a nominal grace, since the expenses and difficulties attending this transaction are such as to render it usually much more advisable to acquiesce in the loss. I should observe that no legal claim what-

* In applying this to Venice, I might say *Xanthe, retro propera*; for this, as well as Molière's best buffonery, is taken from a Venetian farce.

ever ever stands in the way of the harpy claws of the imperial eagle. To give you, however, some more precise notion of the habits of this obscene bird, take the following anecdote, respecting which I shall observe, that the circumstances came under my own immediate observation.

A Venetian gentleman, some time absent from Venice, together with other property in houses, was owner of a magazine, which a tenant held by a *livello*, or life-lease. This man having been long in arrears of rent, the gentleman began to lose patience, and was recurring to rigorous proceedings, when he was informed, by the supposed tenant, that he was no longer possessor of the magazine, the government having seized upon it for the non-payment of the *prediale !* Every day offers similar instances of ruthless rapine.

While such are the burdens and visitations which vex and break down the landed proprietor, the monied proprietor, whether he put his gold out to interest, or whether he brood over his bags, withholding his wealth from healthful circulation,—the monied proprietor is untouched either by direct or indirect taxation.

But, considering the general system of government, there is another point in which the

conduct of the French will appear in a very superior light, if contrasted with that of the Austrians; I mean that of legislation. Under the French, Italy enjoyed all the incalculable advantages of a code, which allowed the cross-examination of witnesses, and gave publicity to all the proceedings of justice. This was indeed so under the ancient government of Venice; but a criminal code was given her by France infinitely superior to what she possessed in the time of her republic. But the system of open pleadings and examinations has given way to one which has abolished the oral examination of witnesses, and to these principles, perhaps yet more precious in Italy* than elsewhere, has been substituted that of written depositions and secret applications to the judges.

When I imagined I had done with my fiscal

* There is, I should suppose, no getting at truth in any country but through the oral examination and cross-examination of witnesses; and the immense number of judicial murders which took place in old France, is no doubt to be attributed to the system of written depositions: but a late Venetian judge once insisted, with me, that this system was more particularly mischievous here. He observed, that the ingenuity of the Italian always enabled him to dress up a story on paper, but that his passionate temperament as universally led him into contradictions on cross-examination.

notices and was sliding into other things, a new tax was notified on land, which is supposed to have been imposed in order to make up for the deficiency which will naturally follow in the custom-house revenue, in consequence of the late prohibitive decrees. It is, however, impossible to enumerate all these changes as they arise; this would be to attempt to give the weight and measure of a body which is continually growing.

You will exclaim, How do the proprietors exist under these accumulated burdens? To this I answer, that an immense number of them are ruined, and those who yet keep together a part of their inheritance, remain without heart or hope. Were the dues of the church in like proportion, they must be absolutely crushed, but these are fortunately light in Italy. To begin with Venice, they are very inconsiderable; but perhaps some account of the clerical œconomy of this place may be acceptable.

Venice is now divided into thirty parishes. The rectors of them have their estates as the Patriarch has; the *minimum* of their respective income being fixed at seven hundred franks, or about thirty pounds sterling; but it is to be understood that more than half of them enjoy a revenue of at least double the amount. The

minimum of the salary of the vicars and coadjutors of these, as they are called, (and there are many such in each parish,) is fixed, as I understand it, at four hundred francs. In general, this last body depend on the auxiliary masses which they celebrate, each of which is paid by the person who causes it to be said, at the rate of about fifteen-pence of our money.

The income of bishops, to reascend in the scale, in like manner, depends, on fixed property or funds, but, if it falls beneath a given sum, is, as well as the preceding deficits, to be made good out of the *cassa di beni demaniali*, as is also that of the country rectors, whose minimum is about thirty pounds a year, arising, as I before stated, out of tythes: But these have often other sources of revenue, in lands or funds. The tythes collected, I mean in the Venetian state, except in some few cases, such as I shall specify in a more general view of this subject, often do not exceed the fortieth instead of the tenth allotment of produce as with us. In consequence, the livings of the clergy are moderate in the *Stato Veneto:* From what I can learn there are not above fifty considerable ones. These, however, are rich, there being perhaps as many which amount to three hundred pounds a year, a

large sum here, more particularly in the country; for we must allow that men are not only rich or poor in proportion to what they *have* and what *that* will buy, but also in proportion to what they *want*. Now in Italy, not only necessaries are cheaper, but (more particularly out of great cities) fewer things are necessary; so that I should almost rate this sum spent in a parsonage in Italy as much more than equivalent to a thousand pounds a year spent in a rectory in England, where, from greater commerce, the modes of artificial life are more generally multiplied and diffused.

I should not conclude my account of the Venetian clergy, without giving some little insight into its character, but that this is now melted into that of the Italian clergy, monastical or regular, and is of course no longer animated by the spirit which distinguished it in the days of *Fra' Paolo*.

The Patriarch, however, retains his authority, as a sort of puny pope, and grants divorces as in the time of the Venetian republic. You will recollect you and I having once discussed the principle of these divorces, which appears such a manifest infringement of the maxims of the Roman Catholic church. What we imagined, I find confirmed upon inquiry: these do not,

in any degree, compromise the doctrine of marriage being a sacrament, and therefore indissoluble; since the union, however sanctioned, has always been held to be conditional as to certain points; and these divorces were and are granted on the allegation of circumstances which would have rendered a marriage void *ab initio*, according to the long established maxims of Rome.

LETTER XXXVII.

State of Tythes in Italy, &c.

Venice, December, 1817.

I PROCEED to give you some general notices on tythes as collected in northern Italy; but these tally so well with my transappennine recollections that I believe (with the exception of Tuscany, where they were commuted for money by Leopold) they will apply, at least in the main, to the southern provinces of the peninsula. I trust my statement will be correct; but I ought not to conceal from you that I have been obliged to condemn, on after-examination, some notices on this subject, on the accuracy of which I relied. The fact is, that there is nothing so difficult as to collect information of this description in Italy. In the first place, the people are not accustomed to the examination of public documents, as with us; such being for the most part inaccessible but to public functionaries. In the next place they are not less presumptuous on account of their ignorance; but answer your queries with a confidence, which imposes till repeated proofs

of the absence of exactness destroy the imposition. A peculiar difficulty has been added to the general ones which attend such a research, in the Venetian state. The taxes upon landed property under the aristocracy were called by the name of tythes, or *decime*, and there was an office at the Rialto, entitled *La Magistratura delle Decime*, for their administration. Hence, I am persuaded, arose many of the mistakes which I detected, though in my inquiries I had sought to guard against such, and particularly specified that I confined my questions to *decime ecclesiastiche*.

There was the less excuse for the blunders I allude to, since, though *decima* is the Italian word for tythe, the ecclesiastic tythe in the Venetian State is usually termed *Quarantese*: though the payment made to the church, or its representative, is not limited to the fortieth part of the produce, as the name would import.

As little is it to be supposed that payment of a tenth is to be implied by *decima*, for there is no general rule respecting the *quantum* of these contributions throughout Italy. In some places it is a payment of one in forty, in others of one in ten, in others of one in eleven, of one in fifteen, and of one in twenty. This variety seems to have sprung out of local cir-

cumstances, at least in the first instance, and to have been afterwards confirmed by custom. What gives weight to this supposition is that the proportion paid is usually highest in mountainous and unproductive tracts, where it seems to have been necessary to tax the proprietors hardest for the maintenance of a minister.

Though the question of quantity is vague and various, the quality of articles subject to tythes, is determined on a more general principle. This is, I believe, almost every where payable solely on *omni genere frugum et animalium*, as it is expressed. But even these words are not to be construed according to their strict acceptation; for though grapes, as forming an article of necessity, are tytheable, other fruits, wherever grown, though articles of common consumption, are not included in the description; being considered as mere articles of luxury.

Another important modification of this principle, is, I believe, general in Italy: the tythe on grain is paid but on one harvest; where more than one, of whatever description, is reaped. This is never locally commuted, but always taken in kind, though the beasts are usually (perhaps always) redeemed by money.

It is, I suppose, on the principle of the exemption of fruits, not productive of a certain pro-

fit, that what we should call orchards, walled in of old, (in this part of Italy termed *broli*, and I believe, in Italian law-language, *terreni casali*,) though perhaps producing other tytheable things,* do not contribute. Sometimes, also, particular lands are tythe free, though they do not come under this description, the causes of such immunity, as in other countries, being forgot.

The most important and general exemption however, of which I am aware is that of waste lands, which are for ever exempted from tythe, on being newly inclosed, unless they should be lands which, having been once cultivated, and having once paid, run waste, and are afterwards rendered anew productive; there being a general rule applicable in this case where not contravened by local custom or rights; the maxim of *soliti solvere solvant*.

It is singular enough that England should be the only country in Europe where the principle

* The *broli* in the north of Italy are usually oblong pieces of walled ground, planted with fruit trees, with grain growing under them, as you see grass or potatoes in an English orchard. A cradle-walk usually runs round them parallel with the walls, which is also productive; as its sides and roof are covered with vines.

of exempting waste lands newly inclosed, for a shorter or longer period, from tythe, has not been practically adopted. The effect is visible; for it is the country in Europe where most waste land is to be found. Waste land however is not here, as you will have seen, exempted expressly *as waste*, which was the case in old France, but incidentally to the maxim of admitting no new claims on the part of the church, the rights of which are determined by prescription.

This leads to much litigation, particularly in the case I have cited, because it must be a matter of doubt, whether lands newly put into cultivation have not formerly been productive, and taxed as such. Such a doubt would, at first sight indeed, appear incapable of solution; but the difficulty is generally provided for by the institutions of the country: for, in most places, a register exists, kept from time immemorial, either by the church or its representative, descriptive of the lands now, or once, subject to tythes; as well as indicative of the proportion in which they contributed; i. e. whether one in ten, or one in forty, &c. To illustrate this document, a map is also often to be found in the possession of tythe owners, whether lay or ecclesiastical, in which the lands are laid down accord-

ing to the specification in the register: and these are the two touchstones by which such questions are tried.

Notwithstanding, however, that disputes frequently arise as to claims or exemptions, this debate set at rest, nothing is more rare, at least in the Venetian State, than *small* squabbles between parishioners and tythe owners, whether priests or lay-men, though the latter are the most rigorous creditors: For these usually send agents into the field in harvest-time, to watch over the conduct of the farmer; a precaution unusual with the clergy, who deservedly pique themselves on their moderation, and take contentedly whatever is given them. As a striking proof of this, I should mention that I was once assured by a Venetian judge, that he did not recollect a suit moved against the farmer for a fraudulent or insufficient payment of tythe, and that, however eager he had seen priests to maintain the interests of their order, he had never had reason to accuse them of individual greediness.

What is the cause of the extraordinary contrast afforded as to this matter, by the clergy of Italy and that of England? The only probable conjecture which I can assign, is, that the lay owners are not so important and powerful a body

as with us, and therefore "bear their faculties more meekly" than those of England. For it is the influence of these men which bears out and encourages the church in the exaction of her dues. As a proof of this, the lay impropriator is always the most rigid claimant; and though our church is much more severe than the Italian in the article of tythes, it is notorious that the clergyman rarely gets what he has, by law, a right to. My inference then, is this. The lay impropriator is naturally the greedy person; but in Italy, he enjoys comparatively little consideration, and has therefore less courage to squabble for his rights, and consequently influences less by his example.

The singular spirit of self-denial which I have stated, would naturally lead one to expect something evangelical in the Italian clergy, but though there are to be found amongst them models of apostolical piety, I do not believe that this is the real characteristic of the class at large. At least an unfavourable inference is to be drawn from the little consideration which they enjoy in this country, always excepting the Roman State. Out of this, you rarely meet priests, (who are not distinguished by learning or talents) unless it is in the house of some bigoted person, who hopes eternal happiness through their mediation.

But their friendly reception, by the religiously inclined, is by no means general. I recollect when I was last in Italy, living on a familiar footing in a family, the mistress of which was a woman of strong religious feelings, and what is in this country called *devout*. Being struck by the absence of priests, I at last, when I thought our intimacy might justify such a liberty, expressed my surprize at never having seen one in the house. She answered "that she hoped I never should—that she considered them as mischievous men, who sowed discord in families with the view of acquiring their direction, which, as far as she was concerned, she was resolved they should never obtain;" observing, very much in the tone of *Shadwell*, on,

"The fatal mischiefs which domestic priests
Brought on the best of families in *Italy*
Where their dull patrons give them line enough.
First with the women they insinuate
(Whose fear and folly makes them slaves to them)
And give them ill opinions of their husbands.
Oft they divide them, if the women rule not;
But if *they* govern them, their reign is sure.
Then they've the secrets of the family,
Dispose o' the children, place and then displace
Whom, and when they think fit, &c."

The Lancashire Witches.

I believe that this lady was not at all singular in her opinions, though I cannot tell, from personal experience, how far they were founded in truth. Were I indeed merely to speak from what I have seen, I should have to report most favourably of the Italian country clergy, who live quietly, and, like the old parochial clergy of France, never mix indecently in the pleasures or bustle of the world.

LETTER XXXVIII.

Originality of Character common amongst the ancient Venetians.

Venice, December, 1817.

The system of taxation, instituted by France, and persisted in by Austria, and which forms the subject of one of my last letters, is so much the more heavily felt by the inhabitants of the Venetian state, from their having been perhaps the people least directly or indirectly taxed, that have ever been subjected to a regular system of imposts. For the Venetian republic laid the foundations of its fiscal system, at a period when commerce afforded it the only substantial source of revenue; and when it became possessed of territory, did not apply itself, in earnest, to the extraction of wealth from this new mine; probably because the nobles being, for the most part, the possessors of the soil, did not chuse to tax themselves. The taxes then both on moveable and landed property were light in the time of the Venetian republic, and princi-

pally consisted, as till lately in America, on duties, whether of export or import.

It is indeed the fashion to consider the extinguished republic of Venice as presenting the most atrocious system of administration that ever existed in Europe. I am inclined to think that its practical atrocities of every kind have been greatly exaggerated. I will mention to you some circumstances which have guided my opinion. To the point.

The first thing that I expected to witness in Venice, which must be supposed to be still, to a degree, under the influence of the impulse given it by the ancient form of government, was a system of manners, more or less indicative of its supposed character. I mean indicative of that system of *espionage*, which I thought, at least, would have shewn itself in some order or other of the people. But I can assure you that in my different visits to this city and its subordinate towns, I have not only not found any thing which savoured of the spirit of division, (I except the case of the *Castelani* and the *Nicoloti*,) but am ready to maintain that I never visited any country, where the people seemed equally linked in love. You cannot walk the town for a day without being struck by this universal spirit of kindness. The young man,

who is perhaps loaded with a burden, if he desires an old man to make way for him, addresses him by the title of *father*, the old man answers him with that of *son*, and you hear continually "*caro pare*" and "*caro fio*" from the mouth of the lowest of the mob. Your servant calls the kitchen-maid his sister, and she hails him as her brother. The Venetians really give you the idea of being members of one great family. It is true that throughout Italy you may observe the inhabitants of every petty city hang together more than in any other country, a consequence undoubtedly of their affections being centered within a narrow focus: But this fact is peculiarly remarkable in Venice.

You will probably allow the justice of the inference I draw from this; but I am not equally sure that I shall have your assent to another of my conclusions. If I can depend upon stories and anecdotes in circulation, the Venetians were distinguished for great originality of character, though this has been depressed under the iron crown of France and the leaden sceptre of Austria. For myself, I see in this an unequivocal proof of their having been in the enjoyment of a very considerable degree of civil liberty, for you may remark that originality of character is never to be found under despotic

governments, except in such persons as are placed by circumstances beyond the reach of power. A *Potemkin* or a *Prince de Ligne* therefore are scarcely contradictions to my theory.

I might furnish a thousand instances in support of the fact, from which I have drawn this inference, but I shall content myself with copying one portrait which was given me to day; this, not only as an illustration, but as affording some sort of relief to the matter of my preceding letters.

But to my picture: the person from whom I shall attempt this sketch was a woman, who died a few years ago. Though not born noble, or ennobled by marriage, she, somehow or other, by her intrigues, obtained a very lucrative employment for her son, who was the support of her family; her husband being a drunken brute, who was a burden to it. Though the custom of the country, and the degrading vices of her husband, might have palliated (if example can palliate such things) her entering into a wider field of gallantry, she confined herself to one lover, with whom she lived forty years, and to whom she gave proofs of a devotion which would pass in England for heroic, if the tie which united them had been of a different description. But though her known inaccessi-

bility, and indeed latterly her age, prevented her from being pursued as an object of gallantry, her wit and powers of pleasing, secured to her a little court to the very end of her life, to the last moment of which she enjoyed such animal spirits as are generally supposed only to be compatible with youth and health. But the most extraordinary part of this woman's character was her philosophy, which, while it wore the stamp of the other sex, did not take from the tenderness of her own, as long as that tenderness could be useful to its object. She never, however, suffered this to interfere unnecessarily with her interests or pleasures, and cast it away the instant it became of no avail.

Two or three anecdotes of her will be illustrative of these facts. Her husband had broken his leg in some debauch, and her son, of whom she was passionately fond, at the same time was seized with a dangerous illness: yet she was, during this dreadful period, never distracted by the variety of calls upon her attention, but passed from one sick room to the other with a method and activity which appeared inimitable.*

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* Having, upon one occasion, been brought to the bed-side of her husband, who she found had called her only to hear his

Her son escaped on this occasion, but died before his mother. When the news was brought her by the priest who had comforted him in his last moments, she, for a moment, sunk under the shock; but a few seconds after, recollected he had that morning changed a dollar for some purpose, and that the change must be in his bed.

She had attended her lover during a long sickness with the same anxious zeal she had bestowed upon her husband and son, scarcely allowing herself a moment of repose. He too died under her care. Those who had seen her half distracted during his sufferings, imagined that her life was wound up in his; but to their infinite surprize, she was seen, the very morning after, walking, calm and unconcerned, in the *Piazza di San Marco*. To some friends, who ventured to intimate their surprize, she observed, that to keep her lover in life, she would have cracked her heart-strings; but she was too sensible of the folly of regret ever to indulge in so useless a passion.

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complaints, she quickly observed, "*Si, sigè e bevè, perchè vu no sè bon da altro; intanto mi vago da quest' altro che muore.*" "Yes, howl and drink, for you are fit for nothing else. In the meantime, I am going to the one who is dying:" i. e. her son.

I might cite various ignobler traits of eccentricity. Take *one:* a Venetian, who died not very long ago, made a provision of torches for his funeral, artificially loaded with crackers, anticipating, to a confidential friend, the hubbub that would result from the explosion; which he had calculated must take place in the most inconvenient spots. It would be an unpardonable omission were I not to state that this posthumous joke verified the most sanguine expectations of its projector.

LETTER XXXIX.

On Venetian and Italian Mercantile Character, &c.

Venice, December, 1817.

THOUGH some faint traces yet exist of the old Venetian character, it should be observed that these are, generally speaking, nearly worn out. The *most* remarkable, as contrasted with the rest of Italy, certainly *is* so. The probity of Pantaloon *was* proverbial, and the honour and punctuality of a Venetian merchant were, I believe, recognized throughout the various provinces of Italy. That this is not now the case, I attribute to the Austrians; but you will, perhaps, be inclined to treat my opinions, on this point, like those of the old fellow-commoner of Cambridge; who ascribed every evil in life, even that of the dogs' befouling his staircase, "to those damned presbyterians."

But I am inclined to be more liberal; and, instead of merely ascribing the change of the mercantile character in Venice to the Austrians, as such, am almost inclined to believe, that public honesty is scarcely compatible with their law.

What this is, may be guessed from the constitution of their tribunals, as well as the code itself, which they administer. A tribunal here is composed of different poor judges. This bodes ill:—but, at least, numbers promise security against corruption.—Not at all.—In each tribunal one judge is charged with the particular examination of a cause. This man, termed a relater, examines the papers and affidavits, and by his opinions his brothers are necessarily guided; for men will not, it may be guessed, go out of their way in search of labours and responsibility. Bribe the *relatore* then, and your business is done.

But this is only one faulty stone in the structure. Alas, the whole fabric is rotten, the whole code, civil and criminal; which, in various ways, serves as a cloak to villany of every various description. An English merchant had a debt of eight hundred pounds due to him from a person of respectability, I mean of respectability in the mercantile world of Venice, and came here with the view of recovering it. The matter came before the chamber of commerce, and the thing was so clear, that, after sundry dirty fetches, the defendant was obliged to pay the money into court. Still the plaintiff was no farther advanced, and the said money was not to be recovered

from the gripe of justice. Month after month passed away; and at last a person, who interested himself officially for the creditor, declared his intention of applying, on his behalf, to the British ambassador at Vienna, and bringing the matter, through him, under the cognizance of the emperor. The answer of the tribunal was, "If you do, your appeal can be of no avail; certain forms are allowed by our law, and these cannot be superseded by the emperor himself; but let the prosecutor wait till Christmas, and he will have his money." To all remonstrances it was answered, "Wait till Christmas—*I cannot tell you more*—but wait till Christmas, and the eight hundred pounds will be forthcoming." Christmas came, and the money *was* paid, nearly an equal sum having been consumed in the litigation. The friend of the poor English merchant now learnt the secret cause of the delays which had been thrown in the way of his client. Christmas is the period when the principal of money, put out at interest, can be called in; and this equitable court, it seems, gambled at usury with the money of its suitors.

An English gentleman, conversant with this place, talking once with me about the mercantile classes of Venice, assured me that he did not

speak paradoxically when he gave by much the highest rank in the scale of honesty to the Jews, the second to the Venetians, and the lowest of all to the Germans who are settled here, and who are amongst the principal money-agents of the city.

But if mercantile honour does not stand high amongst any class at Venice, it must be confessed that it is at a low ebb all over the peninsula; and I do not hesitate to say that, measuring such men by our English standard, I never met with an honest banker in Italy. This is a strong assertion; but I will state on what it is founded. They not only universally dabble in petty gains, which a London merchant would be ashamed of, but put upon you bold and downright frauds. Thus, Friday is the day on which the rate of exchange is settled; I go the Wednesday following to my banker and draw upon him for a hundred pounds, and he gives me, in the coin of the country, five pounds less than I ought to receive. I count my money, and tell him, that, according to the last declared state of the exchange, I ought to have more; but he replies, that he will not cash my bills upon other terms. I am told that the law affords a remedy in this case; but how am I to obtain it? I am a bird

of passage, perched for a little space, and months must roll away, in a paper-war of replies and rejoinders, before I can bring my artillery to bear: for there is no *mesne* process here, excepting that of the bastinado.

But the tricks of mercantile men are not always confined to such petty frauds, and I might select some proofs of my position both from "continent and isle;" I will take the most flagrant I am acquainted with. The scene lies in Sicily. An English merchant there, after a long legal warfare with some merchants of the island, brought his foes to an agreement, which was signed in form. Some time afterwards, these men, repenting them of their act, went to the Englishman, and desired to see the paper again. He, sillily enough, put it into the hands of their spokesman, who instantly tore it to bits. I should not dwell on an individual act of baseness, had it received the chastisement which it merited from society; but I never heard that this piéce of villany brought with it any ill consequences to its perpetrator.

As riches are every thing in Italy, it being premised that most mercantile men here are what we should call rogues, it may be observed that their roguery is usually in proportion to

their rank. The banking knight is naught; but the banking duke is a knave profest.*

In assigning, however, the highest rank in roguery to the greatest and richest amongst the commercial men, I am far from meaning to overlook the claims of subordinate dabblers in money or things vendible. A shopkeeper who has only one price is a thing rare in Italy; and I do not exaggerate, when I say that an Englishman, on his first visit, usually pays double what would be asked of one experienced in the prices of the place.

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* In *Alfieri*'s Life, I find the following confirmation of my opinion. He has just been speaking of an Italian banker's trick, and pursues: "Ma io non avea neppure bisogno di aver provato questa cortesia banchieresca, per fissare la mia opinione di codesta classe di gente, che sempre mi è sembrata una delle più vili e pessime del mondo sociale, *e ciò tanto più quanto essi si van mascherando da signori*," &c.—vol. i. p. 33.

LETTER XL.

Account of the ancient Venetian Nobility—Causes of its Ruin, &c.

Venice, December, 1817.

I GAVE you in a former letter from *Vicenza* some Italian stanzas, in which *Gritti*, the Venetian poet, has sketched his own portrait; I am now tempted to give you another unpublished draught by the same painter, in which he, in a few lines, threw off that of the indigent Venetian noble. I have seen this, as well as the former stanzas given by me, better combed and curled; but I prefer them in their dishevelled state, which bears with it evidence of their having been rhapsodies of the moment.

" Sono un povero ladro aristocratico
Errante per la Veneta palude,
Che i denti per il mio duro panatico
Aguzzo in su la cote e in su l' incude;
Mi slombo in piedi, e a seder' mi snatico,
Ballottando or la fame, or la virtude:

Prego, piango, minaccio, insisto, adulo,
Ed ho me stesso, e la mia patria in culo."*

Some annotations are necessary to make this stanza intelligible. I should observe that, in his "*Mi slombo in piedi,*" *Gritti* appears to allude to the multitude of bows made by the pursuers of patronage, under the porticos of the *Procuratie,* the spot frequented by the members of the *maggior consiglio,* previous to its assembling; and in the "*a seder' mi snatico,*" to a wooden chair in which the Venetian nobles sate, whilst balloting; a mode of voting by which all the patronage of the republic was distributed! It is scarcely necessary to observe, that a large part of these petty princes existed by this: but a more detailed account of the Venetian aristocracy may be, in some respects, new even to you.

The nobles of Venice, though all equal in the

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* I'm a poor peer of Venice loose among her
Marshes! With standing bows I've double grown,
And in my trade of place and pension-monger,
Sate till I've ground my buttocks to the bone;
Balloting now for MERIT, now for HUNGER:
Breaking, myself, my teeth, upon a stone,
I crave, cringe, storm, and strive, thro' life's short farce,
And vote friends, self and country all

eye of the law, were fancifully divided into three classes; the first distinguished as that of the *sangue blò* or *sangue colombìn*, i. e. blue blood or pigeon's blood; the second, as the division of the *morèl de mezo*, or the middle piece, and the poorest of all as *Bernaboti*, or Barnabites; from their inhabiting small and cheap houses in the parish of St. Barnabas.

It will be easily conceived that the poor nobility must have been numerous in a state which considered all the legitimate sons of a patrician as noble; where commerce no longer offered a resource, and the only profession left was that of the law. This class, therefore, subsisting upon the employments of the republic, civil or military, at home and abroad, was necessarily ruined by the revolution. But the cause of the almost general havoc which involved the Venetian aristocracy is not so immediately visible; the less so, as the laws of the *fede-commesso*, which corresponds with our *entail*, were sufficiently rigorous in old Venice.*

* Property did not, however, descend generally in entirety to the eldest lineal heir of the house in Italy as with us; there being families where only a considerable preference was given

I shall try, according to the information I have received, to explain how this was accomplished. The first and foremost cause was the excessive indolence and profusion of the last generations of the nobility, who appear to have resembled the ancestor of Sir Roger de Coverley; who, he tells us, "would sign a deed for a mortgage, covering one half his estate, with his glove on:" with this difference, however, that the Venetian patrician could only mortgage his estate during his own natural life; a circumstance which, it appears at first sight, should have been the protection of the ancient houses of Venice. The protection was, however, in most instances of no avail.

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to the eldest son. There was also a usage in most Venetian families termed the *Mazorasco*, (not to be confounded with the Italian *maiorasco* and the French *majorat*,) which ensured a certain portion to the eldest collateral descendant, should he be older than the lineal one.

Property is now divided in Italy, on the death of a possessor, as it is in modern France. A father, at his death, can only dispose of one small part of his property at his own will and pleasure; this varying according to the number of his children: the other must be equally divided amongst them, whether male or female. If, moreover, he should, in the exercise of this right of preference, favour a child by a single jot more than the law permits, even this privilege becomes void, and all the children share and share alike, without the least regard to the dispositions of the testator.

In almost all countries the laws of honour often contravene the laws of the land, often mischievously; but they sometimes come in aid of sound morality. Such was their effect here. The law of the *fede-commesso* allowed a son to charge himself with the debts of a father, without prejudice to his successors; but it being considered as a point of honour to take up this burden, the son's son succeeded to it, and the debts of one generation were perpetuated through diverse succeeding ones.

Things were in this state when the old government was overthrown, and the law of *fede-commesso* abolished here, as well as all over the countries revolutionized by France. The consequence was the immediate seizure of property so encumbered. This was inevitable; and the creditor of the family of *Cornèr*, or any other Venetian house, seized upon his own.

Thus one of the indirect consequences of the revolution was the destruction of an immense number of Venetian families of the *sangue blò* and *morèl de mezo*. It was, however, more immediately destructive to those denominated the Barnabites, who were at once cut off from all the lucrative offices of the state. Nor was this all: the daughters of the indigent nobility had

all of them pensions which they brought in dowry to their husbands; but place and pension, though bestowed for life, were annihilated, and, in the place of these, a miserable stipend of two Venetian livres a day (not quite ten-pence English) was bestowed on those who condescended to accept of it, by the mushroom municipality which flourished for its day out of the ruins of the aristocracy. Poor as this pittance was, even in this country where necessaries bear a price out of all proportion to luxuries, numbers *did* accept it, under the idea that it would be increased under happier circumstances; but the French, it will be easily believed, did not augment it, and (what could scarcely be believed but by those versed in the proceedings of the cabinet of Vienna) the Austrian government clipt this miserable mite, and clogged it with conditions, which neither the revolutionary municipality nor the French were illiberal enough to impose.

The municipality gave *their* compensation, and, the whole of the *terra ferma* being in possession of the enemy, perhaps they could give no more—the municipality gave it as unrestricted as the pensions it was to replace: the French made no alteration in the system; but the Austrians have not only limited it to per-

sons not having two hundred ducats a-year, (twenty-five pounds sterling,) but have insisted upon its being spent in their own dominions. Of the rigour with which this condition is exacted, take the following example:—A lady, ignorant of the regulations which had been introduced, was absent two years in the south of France; she returned, and claimed the arrears of her pension, without having specified where she had been. The arrears were paid after the usual difficulties, but her absence having been ascertained, she was ordered to disgorge her prey, under the threat of being excluded from all further provision.*

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* I should have mentioned that another violent, though partial, change in property was introduced by the abolition of the law of *fede-commesso*. Succession to entailed property as well as nobility was forfeited by a misalliance; the issue of such marriage being considered as a sort of political *mestis*, and descending into the class styled that of *secretaries*, and the estate going to the next heir male wherever he might be found.

It should, however, be stated, that the law respecting misalliance did not extend so widely as might be expected, this only excepting the daughters of such as were incapable of being inscribed in the *libro d'oro:* and the exercisers of all the liberal professions, such as the advocate, physician, apothecary, and even the music-master, might aspire to it.

Still one class of women was excepted, precisely that with which such misalliances were most frequently contracted, I

I have said, after the usual difficulties: I will now illustrate these. Another lady claimed *seven months* arrears of pension, due during a residence in Lombardy and the Venetian state. Now this was a claim verifiable by a single instrument, her passport, which ascertained the day of her arrival in every town, by the signature of accredited officers of the Austrian police. Notwithstanding this, she was *seven months* more before she could obtain her demand. These were spent in the presentation of petitions, always by order, always on stamped paper, and

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mean the *donne di teatro*. The number of these marriages attests the want of feeling, or at least the entire want of thought of the last Venetian generation of nobility. To the offspring of such, whose fathers were yet alive, a portion of their fathers' lands were given by the abolition of the *fede-commesso*.

To pursue these marriages of the nobility: There was, I believe, no country in the world where such precautions were taken on this subject for the enforcement of what made part of the policy of the state: a nobleman even marrying a noble lady was obliged to communicate his marriage speedily to what was called *Il Collegio*. If he did not, his children remained excluded from all the privileges of nobility. A certain degree of *law* was indeed given to parents, who had neglected this, enabling them to recur by petition to the same body for the same purpose within a limited time; but this term passed, there was no mode of repairing the neglect.

in the almost daily beat of half the official stairs of Venice, either in person or in proxy.*

But I willingly turn away my eyes from a picture, every detail of which is painful, and having described the fortunes of the Venetian nobility, shall give some account of their honours.

The patricians, as I said before, all equal in the eye of the law, had no titles as such, excepting that of *your Excellency;* though some bore them, as *Counts, &c.* of *terra ferma,* before being enrolled in the nobility of Venice; and some had titles assigned them as compensations for, or rather as memorials of fallen greatness. Thus the *Querini,* formerly lords of *Crema,* had the distinction continued to them, after *Crema* was absorbed in the Venetian state.

These families, however, usually let their titles sleep, considering the quality of an un-

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* This is by no means a single case: A Venetian judge, displaced, but pensioned by the Austrians, neglected to receive his allowance according to the example of the others. At length he applied for his arrears, which were denied him. "What," said he, "will you not give me what others have received?" "No!" was the answer, "and those others will be forced to refund."—Note that these pensions had been paid, in virtue of a solemn and *printed* decree.

titled Venetian patrician as superior to any other distinction. Nor does this seem to have been an odd refinement, for the old republic sold titles for a pittance to whoever could pay for them, though such a person might not even have had the education of a gentleman.* It was natural therefore that a Lord of *Crema* should fear being confounded with this countly *canaglia*, and sink his having any thing in common with such a crew.

The great political revolution that has taken place, destroying the splendour of the *libro d'oro*, has induced some to produce their *terra ferma* titles; but the majority content themselves with the style of *Cavaliere*,† which does not necessarily denote actual knighthood; and is often used almost as liberally in Italy, as the denomination of Squire now is in England. A striking proof indeed of good sense and dignity was given by the great body of the Venetian nobility, on being invited by Austria to claim

* The qualification to be a Count was about what is supposed to qualify for knighthood in England, and the fee paid for the title, if I am rightly informed, 20 or 40*l.*

† No order of knighthood was peculiar to Venice, and her citizens were precluded by law from becoming members of foreign orders.

nobility and title from her, on the verification of their rights, the great body of them merely desiring a recognition of their rank, without availing themselves of the offer held out to them. A few, indeed, have pursued a different line of conduct, and received patents of princes, &c.

LETTER XLI.

Characteristics of Italy, Moral and Physical.

Venice, December, 1817.

'TRUMPETS sound, "*Boot and saddle!*" fold your cloaks,
And, guards, convey your king to summer's seat,'
Where no perpetual drizzle drives or soaks;
Where skies are blue, and suns give light and heat;
Where the wind woes you lovingly, and where
Wit walks the streets, and music's in the air.'

Court and Parliament of Beasts.

These few lines comprize, in my opinion, the principal attractions of Italy, and I ought to confess, that I have found all these without going farther south than Venice, in pursuit of them.

Till within these three days, we have had the weather of an English May, with its accompaniments of green peas, strawberries and roses. It is now indeed become very cold, but the sun's rays are still so powerful that it is impossible to take exercise where "at full they play;" and I have frequently acted the traveller in the

fable, and discarded my great coat, as well as taken shelter under porticos.

Italy's skies and suns have passed into a proverb; but I have never yet heard her comparative calm remarked upon: though she affords a strange contrast in this, to England; which may indeed be compared to the island of *Ruach*, whose inhabitants, *Rabelais* tells us, "eat nothing but wind, drink nothing but wind, and have no other houses but weather-cocks." Not only England; I think every part of Europe which I have visited, is more swept by winds than Italy, where continued gales are unknown; such rarely continuing, even in the season of the equinox, for more than three or four days without intermission, so that a winter's gale of wind is here, little more than what seamen call a *summer's gale* in England. A striking proof indeed of comparative calm may be observed in the public gardens of this city. These are situated on the sea-side of the town, yet their acacias are neither bent nor broken.

Something similar may be observed both of the bays of Naples and Genoa, along both of which are thousands of trellised galleries, covered with the vine or the oleander, whose foliage remains undishevelled by the wind.

One understands the immense power of this

in England, and one may say, that living in an island, whether in that of Britain or *Ruach* is like living in a room, with a thorough draft of air. But it seems somewhat more difficult to explain why Italy is so much less buffeted than the remainder of the continent; the more so as its peninsular form would apparently expose it to stronger ventilation. In crossing, some months ago, the plains on the southern side of *Dol*, I observed, that the trees, which border the road, according to the general custom in France, were in some instances drifted, and in others, nearly bent double, so that our flat and exposed coasts could scarcely offer the picture of a more cheerless champaign. Yet this feature of desolation is never seen in the great plains of Italy, though in these, and indeed on hill or dale, you may encounter squall and whirlwind.

In further proof of what I have asserted as to the calms of Italy, I never recollect having seen a windmill in any part of it; though these would be a convenience in some places. There were two in old Venice on the spot where the public gardens, alluded to above, now are, but they were demolished, as I am informed, on account of the insufficiency of wind. During the last blockade an attempt was made to establish one in a yet more exposed situation on

the outer side of the lagoon, which is only shut off from the sea by low and bare islands, but here again the experiment failed, and the inhabitants were obliged to grind what unground grain was brought, in hand-mills.

Probably the chains of mountains which bound and intersect Italy, break or stagnate the winds.* Something also is to be ascribed, perhaps, to the form of the coasts, and the circumstance of their being washed by inland seas, but undoubtedly there is no want of wind in the Mediterranean; and the having sailed much upon this sea, which I have traversed four times in its utmost extent, and having lived five winter months at Malta, enables me to speak with some confidence upon the subject. But I have observed two essential points of difference between the gales of the Mediterranean and the ocean. The wind the most violent, very seldom continues long in the same point, in the Mediterranean; and it may be remarked, also, that even where it blows fresh at sea, it often *does not blow home;* but moderates on approaching the continental coasts.

* The old Venetian proverb of *troppe feste, troppe teste, e troppe tempeste,* seems to be at variance with this; but it is to be remarked that *tempesta* in modern Italian is often used to express a storm of rain or hail.

This absence of storm is no doubt a great delight; but it does not seem a very far-fetched conjecture that the *malaria* may derive a great part of its intensity from such a cause. I have however discussed this subject as well as I could in other Letters. I pass to the conclusion of my text,

"Wit walks the streets, and music's in the air."

These are graces which nobody, I suppose, will deny to Italy; but I have a mind to give you some anecdotes illustrative of my text. My first story will lose much of its point, from being in need of explanation: For this purpose, I prefer a prologue to an epilogue. A favourite game of the populace, all over Italy, called *la morra*, consists in two persons holding up their hands at the same moment, with a certain number of fingers extended. The players guess alternately at the aggregate quantity of these, and he who guesses oftenest right, counts most points. You therefore frequently see two men walking soberly together; one of whom, on a sudden, holds up his hand. I may now introduce my *dramatis personæ*. I was walking, the other morning with my poodle, when, in the social spirit which characterizes Italy, he

was joined by another of his race. Soon afterwards, my beast was seized, as it should seem, by some convulsive affection, and lifted up one of his fore paws, going provisionally upon three. "What's the matter with that dog?" said a Venetian sailor. "Oh don't you see he is playing at *morra* with the other?" answered his comrade.

There is certainly something very droll in the humour which assimilates the actions of beasts to those of men, and, as I am on this ground, I feel disposed to follow up my Venetian with a Florentine story of the same description. In my account of the Vicentine *improvvisatore*, I mentioned that, at a certain hour of the evening, a great proportion of the lower people of Florence sally to serenade their mistresses, a piece of gallantry which is termed *la cucchiata** in the language of that city. An Italian acquaintance of mine was, at this time, passing through a street, when he observed a dog looking wistfully at a bitch in a balcony; but whose admiration was somewhat distracted by

* The serenade made at midnight, and which is, I suppose, of foreign origin, is called by them, *la serenata;* which is the general Italian word for serenades, of whatever season.

a flea-bite: This set him scratching with vehemence, whilst his eyes were still fixed upon his four-footed love. A lower Florentine, who was passing at this moment, stopt, and cried out, "*E' innamorato, suona la chitarra; fa la cucchiata alla bella,*" likening, in his mind, the dog's scratching his ribs, to a man thrumming on a guitar.

Florence and Venice are the two places where you indeed find popular drollery in its greatest perfection, and of that gay and natural cast which characterizes the humour of the Irish.* But this is more or less diffused all over Italy, and, perhaps, is not done justice to, from the difficulty there is in understanding many of the dialects.

Considering national humour as forming a striking feature of national character, I am tempted to enlarge a little more on this subject, and to mention a species of wit, which is, I think, almost exclusively Venetian. Were I called upon to describe this *formally*, I do not know whether

* It is however of a more elegant character than the Irish, and in this respect I should give the Venetian humour a preference over the Florentine, though in the absurd stories I have cited, these two appear, in the lawyer's phrase, *to run pretty much on four legs.* The Venetian wit is lighter: the Florentine is perhaps of a more forcible description.

I could define it more strictly than by saying it consisted in practical jokes brought to bear intellectually. To instances.

A proud patrician, asking a connexion to a great dinner, regretted at the same time that he should put him to the expense of a dress suit of clothes. The guest arrived, habited in black silk, and bringing with him his servant who was to wait, dressed in a magnificent suit of embroidery, the exact pattern of his entertainer's; which he had ingeniously procured from his taylor.

A Venetian lady, famous for her gallantries, being alone with a young man in a gondola, complained of a sudden pain in her back, which prevented her adjusting a garter that had slipped down: She in consequence desired her companion to replace it. He did so, with becoming gravity; and the lady on landing presented him with a box of sugar plums for his pains.

A certain *Abate*, who was an accomplished, but tiresome man, called upon a Venetian gentleman who was just going out, and detained him by complaints of the world. He said, he was learned and clever, but that "*nissun saveva stimarlo*," "that nobody knew his value," or, literally, "that nobody knew how to value him." The friend heard him out, put his arm under *his*,

and carried him away with him. They had not walked far, when the hearer entered the shop of a broker and appraiser, and exclaimed, "*Caro vu, stimème sto Sior Abate, che nissun altro sà stimar.*" "My good friend, value me this Abbé, whom nobody else knows how to value."

A gondoleer was ordered by a foreigner to the church of Saint *Ermagora e Fortunato*, which is known, I do not know why, by the name of *San Marquola*, amongst the Venetian populace. The gondoleer, therefore, not understanding him, rowed him in vain from Saint to Saint, till out of all patience, he carried him to the church of *All* Saints, and bade him "find him out amongst them; since, for his part, he did not know where else to look for him." But I am laying the foundations of an Adriatic Joe Miller.

I have now something to say of *the music in the air*. Though it is undoubtedly of an inferior description to what may be had in the theatres, the street music of Italy, from the general diffusion of this species of talent, on which I have already remarked, is to be considered as infinitely superior to that of the rest of Europe. The present favourite air, "which carmen whistle," is the "*Di tanti palpiti*" in TANCREDI; which is warbled with as much passion as the most tolderollol tunes are bawled about

in England. But here it is curious to watch the progress of refinement. The music is not too delicate for the merest mountaineer; but he often embodies it in words which are more within his reach.

It should be stated, that music all over Italy is to be had on pleasanter and much easier terms than elsewhere, and that, in a country where it is so prized and cultivated, the least fuss is made about it. Except in a new opera which people are anxious to hear through, there are very seldom more than three or four airs, which excite general and deep attention, and during the others, people talk, lounge, and laugh with impunity. You will recollect how differently " things are managed in France," where one is not only expected to be silent, but to look all eye and ear, during an eternal roll of recitative.—

LETTER XLII.

On the Coincidence of Popular Superstitions

Venice, December, 1817.

As I gave you in my last Letter some specimens of popular humour, I shall treat you in this, with an odd example of popular superstition.

As I was passing, this morning, near my kitchen, which, according to the rational practice of Italy, is on the floor which you inhabit, I heard my cook making great lamentations over the loss of a bucket, which had got loose from its rope, at the bottom of the well. I suggested the obvious expedient of lowering somebody down in quest of it; but was assured that even a boy had been already employed upon this service without effect. Upon my expressing some surprize, that more confidence was placed in the exertions of a child, than of a man, I was answered *Ma, Signor, ghe vol un busiaro.* That a liar was thought most calculated for this purpose, somewhat surprized me; but it explained the preference given to a child, on the supposi-

tion that lying is more peculiarly the vice of infancy, though heaven knows it is that of all ages.

This anecdote seems to open some new sources of superstitions: these, as I have already observed, are, in general, the same all over Europe, and are therefore evidently derived from common origins. One is evidently our common religion. Thus the fear, which is entertained here and elsewhere, of beginning a journey or any other operation, on a Friday, and the superstitious awe, which Friday brings with it to a part of the inhabitants of Scotland, may be attributed to the most solemn event, which marks our creed, and which would seem to have given a short triumph upon that day to the powers of darkness. The ill omen of laying the knife and fork *across* seems to be of the same parentage; and the fear of sitting down, thirteen, to table; and the destiny, supposed to attach to the first that rises, evidently comes from the last supper and the end of Judas Iscariot. It is remarkable, that in the famous painting of this, by *Leonardo da Vinci*, and known all over the world through the print of *Morghen*, (which, by the way, bears little resemblance to the original,) Judas is represented as overturning the salt. Did this superstition originate during the sacrificial ceremonies of pagan worship?

But religion, of whatever description, is not the only hot-bed of these follies; which owe their birth even to so unsubstantial a thing as a metaphor. Thus the idea that a present of a knife *cuts love* is as strong in Italy as in England; and the penalty is redeemed in the same manner, by converting a gift into a sale. Does the particular superstition I am recording arise out of an epigram? At least, the idea of sending a liar to the supposed abode of truth, seems to savour of this supposition.

LETTER XLIII.

Observations on the Architecture of St. Mark's at Venice, &c.

Venice, December, 1817.

THERE is, I think, no wonder in Venice superior to the church of St. Mark. *Canaletto* may shew you what it is without, but a *Rembrandt* only could give an idea of its interior. Precisely as I should, with Warton, try the taste of one who professed to love poetry, by *Lycidas*, or any beautiful piece which could not be brought to the standard of general rules, so I should sound the feeling of any one in matters of architecture by the impression which he received from the grand canal, the *piazza*, *piazzetta*, and, above all, the interior of St. Mark's. If I could have visions any where, it would be here. There is without doubt something particularly imposing, when employed for religious purposes, in that species of mixt architecture produced at Constantinople, which I will venture to call Greek-Gothic, and which bears the visible sign of its purpose, the uniting two dissimilar ages in one

common creed. But the picturesque effect of the church is, no doubt, in part, produced by the mixture of painting and gilding, peculiar to this style of building, as well as by the distribution of light, all which come in aid of the architecture. *Gilpin* indeed tells us that the picturesque eye overlooks colour. This, taken in the plain acceptation of the phrase, is, to my understanding, perfectly monstrous; for, were it true, a landscape of *Poussin*'s would be reduced to the level of one of his own dirty daubs, and a forest in winter offer the same beauties, as one variegated with all the tints of Autumn.

Though I have not been able to pass over St. Mark's in silence, do not imagine that I am about to drag you through the various churches of Venice, which deservedly form the admiration of the artist and amateur.

I abstain, too, from enumerating pictures and statues. For these, I shall send you to Guide-books, which are safe authority in this matter, if not in other respects; since they give you a regular list of lions, all which you must once see with your own eyes; though there may not be a quarter of them that you would revisit.

LETTER XLIV.

Visit to the Island of Torzelo, and Reflections excited by it.

Venice, December, 1817.

THOUGH I told you in my last I should turn you over to Guide-books for lions, (and there is a very good one for this city,) I do not mean to abhere rigidly to such a resolution, as there will sometimes be objects of curiosity, deriving their interest from association, or some other less definable cause, which deserve the notice of the traveller, though not registered amongst the wonders of a place.

Of this nature was an object of curiosity, which I almost stumbled upon by accident. Having visited the manufactures of *Murano* and *Burano*, and witnessed such a scene of promiscuous misery as I feel no temptation to describe, I prolonged my voyage, and landed on the nearly desert island of *Torzelo*, about six miles from Venice.

This spot, once the summer resort of the Venetian patricians, and covered with their villas

and gardens, presented a very different character of desolation. My eyes were neither pained by the visible progress of ruin, nor disgusted by the meanness of the instrument which had wrought it. Time was here the great destroyer, and, moreover, Time had done his work.

I was favoured by one of those delicious days of sunshine, common even in a Lombard winter, which in some degree mitigated the melancholy of the prospect, and enabled me to saunter and view, without inconvenience, all the circumstances of the scene. Amidst the vestiges of departed grandeur were left some poor and scattered houses, and a church, the *rifacciamento* of which dates, I believe, from the eleventh century. A broken column marked the centre of what had been the piazza, and from which had once waved the standard of St. Mark. Amidst these remains glided a few human beings, the miserable tenants of the place.* There was nothing striking in the architecture, nothing picturesque in the landscape, but the whole made an impression upon me which no other ruins ever produced. Whilst I was musing upon the prospect before me, a clock

* A stray English doctor had been marked down there; but I did not put him up.

from a half-ruined tower tolled twenty. Time only had suffered no change, together with the monuments he had overthrown: He spoke an antiquated language, hardly intelligible to the generation of the day.

The church here, though not very striking in point of architecture, had in itself some interesting features. Its stone shutters, carrying one's ideas back to days of violence, are, as far as my observation goes, a singular remnant of such an age; and some very curious mosaics, in the inside, may vie in beauty, and antiquity with those of St. Mark.

To return, however, to the general impression made upon me by this isle of ruins, other and less fantastical reflections succeeded to those which first presented themselves. Gazing upon the scene before me, I could not but muse upon the way in which Venetian empire had been lost and won. When this scene was gay with villas and with vineyards, Venice contented herself with insular dominion, and this may be considered as the most flourishing and triumphant era of her state. She sought and obtained continental greatness, and thus sloped the way to her destruction. Her ruin was not indeed the immediate consequence of this change of policy, but it was evidently the first step towards it; nor,

in her after-struggles for dominion or existence, was she ever capable of the gigantic effort she made under the Doge *Michièl*, for the conquest of Constantinople. For when we consider the extent of this, the number and burden of the vessels which composed her armament, we may perhaps affirm that the history of the world does not present a more striking picture of the unassisted powers of commerce.

We are at first disposed to allow no quarter to statesmen, who depart from the steps of their fathers and risk the glory and happiness of their country upon a new foundation; but we shall find grounds for alleviating our censure, observing that these men usually either imagine they are only taking a new road to the same object, or at least believe they have not lost sight of it, in the new path which they have struck out.

Thus the first wars carried on, and the first acquisitions made by Venice upon *terra ferma*, had all a view to the immediate furtherance of her commerce. The trade she drove with Lombardy, by means of the large navigable streams which intersect it, was continually interrupted by the vexations of the Paduans, &c. and her manufactured and imported articles shut out at this important entrance. Her first temptation

therefore was to get possession of the mouths of these rivers: Experience shewed her it was useless to stop there, and that if she meant to accomplish her object, she must ascend them from "fill to fount." Thus was she involved in continental struggles, which, by degrees, changed their character, and her riches and resources were diverted into channels which brought no return. Meantime she left that part unarmed in which she was most vulnerable; and resembled the stag in the fable, who turning his blind side to the quarter from which he expected no danger, was slain by an arrow from the sea.*

The discovery of the Cape of Good Hope and America must indeed have been cruel wounds to this republic: but I am led to think that the necessary consequences of these two changes have been somewhat exaggerated. The discovery of the Cape deprived her of a mighty source of wealth, which flowed through Alexandria; but what deprived her of her commerce, and what of her colonies, in other parts of the Mediterranean and Archipelago? What cut off her trade with the interior of Africa? What with Flanders, so flourishing in the earlier

* I allude to the loss of Cyprus and the war of Candia.

days of the republic? What, in short, prevented her sharing, as a nation, in the very discoveries to which the science and enterprize of some of her citizens appear to have contributed?*

If it is urged that she was less favourably situated than others for such a purpose; so was she for the traffic which she drove with Flanders; so that the trifling difference of distance can scarcely be considered as an argument. It might be said to her that it was the mis-direction and abuse of strength, and the loss of a right spirit rather than any particular misfortune,

"Which sunk so low that sacred head of thine."

The evil once received into her system, she never rallied from it; and nations are like individuals: They may recover from acute and accidental diseases, but there is no cure for debility and chronic ones. Venice will now soon be what sailors call a sheer hulk. May she be a sea-mark to others, and may her wreck teach them to avoid the rocks on which she split!

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* More will be said on this subject in a succeeding letter.

LETTER XLV.

Fresco Paintings in San Rocco—Restitution of ancient Monuments to Venice, &c.

Venice, December, 1817.

It is a dangerous thing to make resolutions. I am again tempted to depart from that, which formed the subject of a former letter, unless the *salvo* which I there made may be considered justificatory of such a proceeding. This, to excuse a visit, or rather some account of a visit, which I made a few days ago to the ancient convent of *San Rocco*, the walls of which are covered with the paintings of *Tintoretto*, &c. I had seen many separate works of this master at Florence; but these viewed separately give no more idea of the powers of the painter than a stray canto of *Ariosto* does of those of the poet. The seeing this grand assemblage of his paintings together produces something like the effect of reading the *Orlando;* and *Tintoretto* may be truly characterized as the *Ariosto* of picture.

These frescoes were never removed; but the

pictures and relics of departed Venetian greatness, which had been carried away, are all replaced *in statu quo*, and the pictures have no doubt gained by the exchange, since some of them (that, for instance, of the martyrdom of St. Paul) were painted for particular lights.

I cannot, however, for one, detesting, as I do, the atrocious system of robbery, which placed the pictures and marbles of Italy in the Louvre, see those grounds for quarrelling with their distribution which have been discovered by various Englishmen. Speaking *absolutely*, it is impossible that statues or pictures, crowded as these necessarily were, could be seen to the best advantage; but, allowing for this difficulty, the art displayed in their arrangement, appeared to me to be admirable.

It gave me great pleasure that the horses which were taken down and packed by the English, arrived the least injured at their destination. The lion, removed by other hands, was less fortunate. He was, however, repaired, and horses and lions were hoisted, by the *arsenalotti*, into their respective stations, with a precision not inferior to that of our own seamen.

I am told, that on the day of the restoration of these national monuments, a general movement was to be seen amidst the populace. They

assembled in groups, with tears in their eyes, talking over their departed happiness and grandeur, favourite topics with the Venetians of all classes; and I am assured that had there been a leader to animate them, the canals of Venice might have run red with Austrian blood. The clouds fortunately cleared away; I say fortunately, for what good effect could be hoped from such a tempest? Divided and broken, as Italy is, a revolution, if successful, could but be local, and if only local, could never be permanent, unless protected by foreign power. A union of her provinces indeed would be an eternal bulwark, and in cementing these together, she would build a wall of brass about her frontier. Two moments (for they were but moments) seemed to afford some faint hope of such a consummation, but the master-mason slept, and the mystic head was not heard. It has spoken twice, and may speak thrice: but it will speak in vain.

LETTER XLVI.

On the Possibility of a Union of the Italian Provinces.

Venice, December, 1817.

To pursue the subject of my last letter: I have been sometimes amused by the facility with which people at home unite the Italian provinces under one government. They seem to consider them as a parcel of walnut shells thrown into a washing glass, after dinner, which must come together through the force of mutual attraction. They have not, however, yet begun to act or be acted upon by this reciprocal spirit of coalition; nor did I ever see any thing indicative of such a principle, if I except a few loose wishes from a few young men who called themselves *Unitarians*, and (if I recollect rightly) confined their efforts to wearing a blue coat and white waistcoat as the symbol of their fraternity. In truth cognate provinces, as long as they are upon a footing of equality, can never be effectively consolidated. They may indeed unite *federatively*, but to do this they must first become re-

publics, for we have not yet heard of *federative* monarchies, as the word is rightly understood: a circumstance which seems to afford an argument against the vulgar position, that republics are worse neighbours than despotic states.

There is indeed only one way in which cognate provinces may coalesce into the strictest union, a principle that has been illustrated in France and Great Britain; that is, by one of these possessing such a superior degree of wealth and strength as could bribe or force the others into union. It was on this ground I said that the magic head destined to give the signal for building a brazen wall about Italy had spoken twice: the first time was when the fabric of Buonaparte's power fell to pieces. Had *Eugene Beauharnois* then been guilty of one of those splendid crimes, which are to be abhorred or justified not only by the motive which dictates them but by the success which attends them; had he raised his standard, and Lombardy risen at his back, all Italy might perhaps have been gathered beneath it. A second opportunity was offered when *Murat* marched his legions north: this was an ill-conceived enterprize: still fortune presented herself for a moment, but this adventurer let her slip through his arms. Had he, instead of losing time in attempting to possess

himself of the batteries on the *Pò*, a paltry precaution when we consider that his enterprize necessarily involved success or ruin, and that retreat was impossible—had he, instead of this, given his enemies the slip, and marched into Piedmont, he would have found there the remnants of a discontented soldiery, trained to conquest, and who would possibly have lined his army with such strength as might have enabled Italy to make a desperate effort for independence. He did not; and the last stake was lost.

LETTER XLVII.

Description of the Fire in Cà Cornèr—*Conduct of the Austrian Government and Troops—Mode of constructing the Foundations of Houses in Venice—of supplying the City with fresh Water.*

Venice, December, 1817.

The repose of Venice, a few nights ago, was fearfully disturbed. At about one in the morning, cannon were heard, the drums beat the general, and troops assembled from all parts. The first fear was that of a revolution; but this was soon changed for another, somewhat less alarming. The cry of *fogo!* was soon heard in all directions, and a pyramid of flame which burst out at no great distance, confirmed the truth.

The sort of square in which my house was situated, was soon filled with people, but again abandoned; so that the stage, at intervals, remained clear. And that there might not be wanting some strange resemblance to an Italian drama, three men of a low description, who were apparently ignorant of the alarm, sud-

denly appeared, tuned their guitars, and began a serenade. Their ill-timed music was paid in a coin which they little expected: a party of soldiers issued from the military governor's house,* opposite to that which I inhabit, surrounded the unfortunate musicians, and drove them away to assist at the extinction of the fire. They, as you will easily conceive, had recourse, but in vain, to complaints and remonstrances. "*Malatetti, niente capir*," was the only answer; the intended force of which words was inculcated by a few pricks of the bayonet. I should be ashamed to mention the momentary effect which this strange interlude produced upon me, if it was not notorious that the mind is sometimes most sensible of the ludicrous, when under the influence of awful impressions; a circumstance which, perhaps, explains the possibility of our deriving pleasure from a mixture of the horrible and the ridiculous in works of fiction; though this, in common theory, would appear a con-

* The history of this house may give some general notion of the state of Venice. It was parted with a few years ago for a small sum by its last proprietor, a once rich and noble lady, who died in the last stage of indigence and misery, or, as the Italians term it, "*upon straw.*"

junction monstrous and disgusting.* As I had no wish to share the fate of the conscribed, and had no reason to believe my infirmities would be a protection, I remained at home, or, to speak more precisely, in bed.

The house in which this fire took place was a magnificent palace, situated on the grand canal, entitled *Cà Cornèr*, which I saw whimsically enough translated, in an English paper, the Corner-house, and such it in fact was. The family of *Cornèr*, you will recollect, formerly gave a crown to Venice,† but their genealogical tree is now withered, root and branch. They had, accordingly, sold this magnificent patrimony, for a trifling sum, to the Austrian government, which occupies, for its various offices, nearly double the space of that to which it succeeded on the expulsion of the French.

It is scarcely possible to imagine a house more happily situated for the extinction of fire; for the basement story is washed, in front, by the grand canal, and laterally, by one of the *rii*, so that it is accessible on two sides by

* Madame de Stäel says, I believe, in her *Delphine*, "le péril monte la tête comme le vin."

† The crown of Cyprus.

water; an immense advantage, because the engines, which are placed in well-boats, thus occupy positions both in front and flank, and have a constant supply: Unless indeed the Austrian soldiers could be supposed to have grounds for their belief, that salt-water will not extinguish fire; a street anecdote which was current next day, and which, if not true, will at least shew you in what estimation their wits are held by the Venetians. The weather too, which was drizzling, seconded local advantages, but the flames raged, for a time, unabated, continued for four-and-twenty hours, and finally reduced the interior of this princely fabric to a heap of ruins.

Some account of the mode of operations for the extinction of the fire, will explain the cause, and indeed to some of these I was an eye-witness; though, for the greater part, I remained, whilst others

> "Survey'd the whole scene with wonder,
> Much like Caligula, under a bed,
> Studying the cause of lightning and thunder."

I have already mentioned the vicinity of the governor's house to my own. Now the fire, though it appeared very near, was almost instantly proclaimed to be in *Cà Cornèr* at the distance of nearly half a mile. Notwithstand-

ing this, the first detachment of troops which was formed, instead of at once moving to the spot, proceeded very deliberately to examine the governor's premises, and having ascertained that there was no fire *there*, marched off in what, I suppose, they called quick time, to the place where there *was*.

The fire in the mean time was of course gaining ground, and indeed continued to do so after their arrival; a circumstance which will not appear extraordinary, considering their conduct. For the soldiery of an Alaric could not have presented a more barbarous spectacle of indiscipline. More intent on plunder, than assisting in the extinction of the fire, these men forced the doors, and seized upon cases containing money,* or papers, which they broke up and

* Some of these deposits belonged to clerks employed by the government, who were totally ruined by their losses. It is to be observed, that the Italians rarely place money in the hands of a merchant, but with a view to traffic. Hence all keep money for present use in their desks, and some enormous sums. I do not exaggerate when I state that I knew an instance of a strong closet found propped, at the death of its proprietor, on account of the weight of gold contained in it.

In support of the generality of this practice, and the necessity of it, I shall mention two anecdotes. Wishing to profit by

threw into the flames, appropriating their contents: they dashed in pieces magnificent mirrors, the manufacture of the country, carrying

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one of our few lucid intervals of exchange, I once drew four hundred louis in a considerable Italian city. I wished to deposit these in the hands of the person who had supplied them, but he refused the charge. I at last found a person who took them, but he tormented me so continually to take them back, that I was obliged to acquiesce in his desire. His reason was, that, as the time at which I might have occasion for them was uncertain, they were a useless incumbrance to him.

I was more fortunate in my banker than an Italian friend, from whom I learned accidentally that he had several thousand francs deposited in his house in the country. Remonstrating with him on the danger of this, he asked me, "What I would have him do?—that he had once deposited a large sum in the hands of a banker, and that, on redemanding it, he told him frankly he had it not in his possession, and that it would take him a considerable time to re-collect it."

I need hardly observe how strongly the practice I have mentioned, attests the honesty of the Italian servants; for nothing is more rare than a domestic robbery, indeed so rare, that *I* never knew an example of it. I have lost many things travelling, but never had any reason to believe that they were stolen; and an ingenious English artist, long established in Italy, with whom I recollect comparing notes on this subject, told me, that getting up one morning in Rome, about ten o'clock he perceived he had lost a book, which he thought he must have dropt from his pocket overnight in searching for his house-key. He immediately went in pursuit of it, and found it lying in the

off the fragments to serve them as shaving-glasses in their quarters, and, in their senseless love of plunder, stuffed even the well-soaked sponges of ink-glasses into their breeches-pockets.

Yet the Austrian soldier, thus lawless when protected by circumstances of night, and numbers, is the same man who lets himself be bastinadoed in sunshine with complacency; who issues from his rank at the bidding of a corporal, makes a back, receives a caning, thanks the inflictor, and returns in ordinary time to his company.

You would, perhaps, think this system little calculated to fit a man for the various duties of a soldier, and not even likely to have the immediate effect which it is intended to produce. Such is not the opinion of the majority of continental marshals and martinets. These, with the exception of the French and Italians, who abhor the stick as much as the English, seem to think that a magic virtue resides in the cudgel of the corporal. But if the system is bad, the abuse to which it is open is infinitely worse; for it is

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street before the door, though thousands perhaps had passed in the interval between the loss and the recovery.

The mirrors mentioned in the text belonged to the family, which had not yet removed them.

to be recollected, that in all services, more especially the one in question, there are fops and tyrants, men

" Whose paltry passion is for slang and swagger,
The soldier's bestial oaths, and brutal jeering;—
For jargon, and jackboots, and sword and dagger,
And picketing, and caning, and cashiering."
Court and Parliament of Beasts.

How little essential discipline seems to be promoted by this system, has been seen upon the present occasion. But if the conduct of the troops had been more respectable, and had they laboured heartily in the service, on which they were commanded, there were not arms wherewith to combat the enemy. There were indeed seven engines in the Arsenal, but only one was fit for action. To render the others available, they seized the first object which came to hand, and official papers, containing accounts, &c. were applied to the stoppage of holes and crevices. The story told was, that application had been previously made to the government of the place for their repair; but the answer given, that a representation must first be made upon the subject at Vienna. However this may be, the fact that they had been for months out of repair was notorious throughout Venice.

In this country (I may say throughout Italy) the system of insurance against fire is unknown, as is the insurance of life;* and indeed the only species of insurance which I know of is that of contraband English goods. It will follow from what I have stated, that the only means of combating fire reside in the government. In the ancient state of Venice, the provident care of the magistracy was conspicuous with regard to this; for the *arsenalotti*, or artificers, of the Arsenal, were, in addition to their other services, employed as firemen, and, as such, richly paid and encouraged. These, in the days of the republic, amounted to three thousand; they are now reduced to as many hundreds, ill-paid, and, in consequence, ill-affected to their employers. It was said, that they worked upon this occasion with courage and activity† in tearing down

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* The insurance of life is unknown in Italy. Captains of ships sometimes get it done at Constantinople.

† They gave a strong proof also that they were of superior honesty. A connection of the family, with whom I had intercourse, had some pipes of foreign wines in the cellars; he broke into these when the pillage was at its height, with a band of *arsenalotti*, making his approach by the *rio* which I have mentioned, and carried off all his treasures without loss, his

walls to prevent the communication of the fire, but that their efforts were not commensurate in extinguishing it. Their conduct may be explained in two ways. It would not, perhaps, be attributing too much to Italian refinement to suppose that they might labour cheerfully for the preservation of the property of their fellow citizens, while they saw with pleasure the destruction of that of the government. Another and more simple cause would, however, afford sufficient explanation. These men, ill-paid at other times, were well rewarded, by the day, when thus employed. So that they found their account in necessitating the prolongation of their services.

The *Cà Cornèr* was sold to the Austrian government for the sum which had been expended on its *riva*, or water-foundations.

I have not, in my account of the localities of Venice, explained how these are formed. I shall take this opportunity to supply the deficiency. The water is excluded, as with us in works of a similar description: The first stratum of soil below the bottom of the canals is then thrown

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assistants contenting themselves with the gift of five or six dollars, and not having pierced a cask.

out, because this, as being soft alluvial matter, affords no solid foundation, and piles are driven into that beneath it, which appears to have been the original bed of the lagoon, and on which a mass of mud or malm (*melma*) has been accumulated.

This naturally suggests another question. Such being the nature of the soil, how is Venice supplied with water? Every *campo* has its wells; but these, though wells in appearance, are, in fact, great reservoirs of rain water, which, as the pavement slopes towards them, is received in drains lined with sand, and so filtered into its receptacle. This, that the salt water may not penetrate it below, is carefully bricked with mortar, upon a body of cement and clay. The water thus collected is very considerable in quantity, yet much more might undoubtedly be procured, were the roofs of the houses constructed of flat terraces, as is the case in Malta. It is true, indeed, that what runs from them into the *campi* is conveyed into the wells; but what runs from them into the *rii* or the *cale* is lost: in the *rii* necessarily, in the *cale* because they are so dirty from the throng of passengers, that the water would be rendered unfit for use, as well as collected with difficulty.

Still a sufficiency of rain-water is usually

obtained, though in hot and dry summers, like the last, the city is not sufficient to itself. In this case, however, it is not without a supply; for water is then brought, at a reasonable price, from the *Brenta;* and, as a resource against a blockade, large reservoirs are formed in the *Lido.* The possibility of these running short, led the government, at a time that the enemy was in possession of the main land, to bore for a spring on this spot, and the experiment was attended with apparent success; but the quick exhaustion of the supposed source, as well as its mixed character, (for it was slightly brackish,) proved it to have been probably salt water percolated through the sand.

Still there is no doubt that fresh water might be obtained by sinking deep enough, in Venice, since ancient wells existed in *Torzelo* and some other islands of the æstuary. Indeed it has been found *here*, but always in a spot where it could be of no avail, as in driving piles for the foundations of houses, &c. It is usually unimprisoned on piercing a hard stratum, which lies under the moist alluvial matter of a later date. This is called, in Venetian, *caranto;* but I am, unfortunately, ignorant of its Italian, French, or English name. It appears to be a species of indurated earth, the outer crust of

which requires to be broken with the pick-axe. On the inside, however, it is soft and saponaceous. Masses, seemingly of this description, are to be seen on the beach, at the foot of *Hordle* cliff, in Hampshire, which have been brought down by streams, in a different state, from the height above, and apparently acquired their new character from the mixt action of fresh and salt water* with which they are occasionally covered. This substance is at *Hordle* of a blue colour; it is here sometimes blue and sometimes of a yellowish cast.

With regard, however, to the main point, there exists very curious evidence of Venice having been anciently supplied with fresh

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* The circumstance of this substance being always, I believe, found on the surface in planes apparently exposed to the action of salt water, would lead me to suppose that such was necessary to its formation. If this be so, we have here a strong argument for the great plain of Lombardy having been once covered by the Adriatic, since the *caranto* is found every where. Near Modena, as here, it forms the crust covering the springs, which lie about sixty feet deep. Yet the plain of Modena is, according to Sir George Shuckburgh, 200 feet above the level of the sea.

I cannot leave Hordle cliff unnoticed on another account. The rare fossils, found there, are of the same kind as many discovered in the mountains near Verona.

spring-water. In the year 1680, when the canal called the *Canaregio** was deepening, (the canal which forms the entrance to Venice on the landward side of the Lagoon,) a considerable source of water was discovered which was more nearly fresh than salt.

It rose from the centre of a quadrilateral cassoon, composed of thick planks secured by strong palisades; the points of which were planted one foot beneath the then bottom of the canal, and seven beneath the low water mark. The cassoon itself, was seven feet deep. The spring which issued from it was so copious, that it was found impossible to exhaust it. A ship's pump, with the bottom of the tube secured by a plug, was then forced into the hole from which it sprung. This drawn, the water rose perfectly fresh and sweet to the surface. There is then no doubt that the surface of the cassoon was formerly above ground, and it must have formed a cistern for the receptacle of fountain water before the canal existed, and before the slow but progressive rise of the tides had overwhelmed it.

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* In Italian, *Canal regio.*

Of this increase and invasion of the sea there is no doubt, though some persons imagine that Ocean has long been calling off his waters from the Lagoon. A few facts are sufficient to disprove this error. In the island of *San Secondo*, in front of the *Canaregio*, some years ago, were discovered Roman pavements and vaults, three feet and a half beneath low water mark, and the rise of water would seem to have been more rapid in ages more nearly approaching our own time; for, in turning the church of *San Geminiano*, in the place of St. Mark, into a palace, and penetrating below the ancient foundations, a *puntìl*, (as it is called here,) or wooden landing place, like those in modern use, was discovered beneath them.

It is impossible to conjecture, with any probability, the date of the cassoon-fountain that I mentioned, since some woods, when exposed to the sole action of salt water, will last for many centuries, and palisades have been found here in pavements, known to be Roman from the stamp and inscriptions of the tiles of which they were composed. For the rest, the change in the channels which intersect the Lagoon is common, and easily explained: They depend on currents, which again depend on the rivers which flow into it, and vary according to the volume of water

which these bring down, or the impediments it meets.

Besides the reservoirs which I have mentioned in the Campi of modern Venice, there are some in private houses, and there were two in *Cà Cornèr*, in which, according to vulgar belief, the water was filtered through quick silver and gold dust, instead of sand. Tradition said that these had been formed by a *Cornèr* (not the *Cornèr*, I imagine, who published on regimen) as a precaution against the gravel: But the magnificence of the patrician palaces is sufficiently indicative of the disposition of the proprietors, without recurring to the exaggerations of fable. The houses of the rich nobles are spacious throughout Italy, but more particularly in Venice. The palace of an acquaintance of mine, now sold for nearly nothing, in consequence of a distress for taxes, lodged two or three branches of his family, and contained upwards of seventy bed-rooms.* The immense size of these buildings is explained by the supposition that those of the more ancient nobles served for magazines as well as dwelling houses, and that the fashion, thus begun, was continued; though the motive for it no longer existed.

* In the kitchens were 100 stoves.

One more last word respecting the *Cornèr* palace: I have already mentioned that it had been converted into an office; and in this were deposited public papers of considerable importance. A quantity of these were missing, which could not be supposed to have been destroyed. Two days afterwards I saw a placard on the walls, on the part of the government, not offering a reward to any one who should restore them, but threatening those who retained them with vengeance, much in the tone a conjuror or witch would, I suppose, employ against such as had purloined their cat or their cauldron.

A day or two afterwards there came out a new order of the government, in the Venetian Gazette, highly complimentary to the troops who had been employed, and full of commendations of their discipline and activity.

LETTER XLVIII.

Venetian Festivals, Customs, and Table—Difference of National Taste, &c.

Venice, December, 1817.

THE Christmas holidays, properly speaking, are just past. The first, beginning with Christmas eve, is a day of great festivity with the Venetians; one of those on which the head of a house usually entertains his family and friends; almost every such person having a day, as St. Martin's or Christmas eve, appropriated to such a purpose. On these occasions the rich and liberal feed many, and feast high, though in the present instance, as it is the vigil of a holiday, and one of those very few meager days which are (generally speaking) observed by the Italian laity, their fare is confined to loaves and fishes. Even I cannot refuse a tribute to the excellence of the table of Christmas eve, though, after feeding two or three months on Catholic and frugal cates in Tuscany, where

—— "il cane sen doleva e 'l gatto
Che gli ossi rimanean troppo puliti,"

*Pulci.**

* —————————— where dog
And cat complain'd the bones were gnaw'd too clean.

I had reason to say, with Mercutio, " O flesh, flesh, how art thou fishyfied!" and am still almost at odds with ichthiophagy.

This is, however, less dreadful because more varied on these solemn days. On these the Italians usually dine late; and on this occasion the lower people of Venice seldom dine at all, working double tides at supper. The practice seems to originate in the notion that it is not right to make superfluous meals on this solemn day, the inconsistency of turning the single one, to which they confine themselves, into a feast, having nothing which is revolting to their ideas. It should, however, be observed, that this practice depends purely upon popular opinion, and on no injunction of the church.

Speaking of these *feasts*, I was invited, I recollect, once, on St. Martin's day, by a hospitable family of Vicenza, but declined the honour, on being informed by an annual guest that the table was laid on that occasion with forty covers. It is difficult, indeed, to conceive any thing more tedious than one of these solemn repasts, on whatever occasion it may be held, at which every dish is carved and circled at intervals. This is, no doubt, a most rational custom in the main, leaving host and guests at liberty; but the time, occupied by the practice, when the society is numerous, is surely more than a counterbalance

to the convenience. I remember, for instance, being once present at a dinner, given by the cardinal pro-secretary of state at Rome, where the company consisted of twenty-five persons, and the dinner, in consequence, lasted for three hours. I don't know whether three or four other English, who were present, suffered as much as I did, but, for myself, I never felt half so fatigued at any after-dinner-sitting in England or in Scotland. For, though both customs are bad enough, it is surely better to drink when one is not dry than to eat when one is not hungry.

For the Venetian holidays I have mentioned there are set dishes,* as there are with us, and some of them of as strange composition: witness, one of fruits, preserved with sugar, spices, and mustard, which is the Venetian equivalent for a minced-pie. For the rest, the fare of Christmas eve, though meagre, is, as I have said, magnificent, always bating a sort of pye-pottage, called *torta de lasagne*, which might, I suppose, pair off with plum-porridge itself.

There is indeed one circumstance very favorable to the meagre department of the kitchen. The Mediterranean and Adriatic, in addition to

* Generally termed *piatti di rubrica.*

most of those of our own coasts, have various delicate fish which are not to be found in the British seas. Of the tunny, sword-fish, and many others of the larger classes, you have of course read. Some others, which are rare with us, as the red mullet, swarm in these latitudes; and some tribes which *are* known to us, here break into varieties which are infinitely better flavoured than the parent stock. Amongst such may be reckoned a sort of lobster,* a crab of gentler kind, and various shell fish, entitled *sea-fruit*† in Italy, all which might well merit the eloquence of an Athenæus.

But not to pass by the *torta de lasagne*, of which I had nearly lost sight, though its taste is fresh in my recollection: It is composed of oil, onions, paste, parsley, pine-nuts, raisins, currants, and candied orange peel, a dish which, you will recollect, is to serve as a prologue to fish or flesh!

It ought, however, to be stated that the ordinary pottage of this country, and which is, generally speaking, that of all ranks in Venice, requires no prejudices of education or habit to

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* The real lobster is, however, rarer in the Mediterranean than with us.

† *Frutti di mare.*

make it go down, but may be considered as a dish to be eat at sight. It consists in rice boiled in beef broth, not sodden, and *rari nantes*, as in England and France, but firm, and in such quantity as to nearly, or quite, absorb the *bouillon* in which they are cooked: To this is added grated Parmesan cheese. And the mess admits other additions, as tomatas, onions, celery, parsley, &c. Rice thus dressed, which have drunk up the broth, are termed *risi destirai*, as capable of being spread, right or left, with the spoon. There is also a vulgar variety of the dish, termed *risi a la bechèra*, or rice dressed butcher fashion. In this the principal auxiliary is marrow, which, if it is entirely incorporated in the grain, makes a pottage that (speaking after a friend) would almost justify the sacrifice of an Esau.

The mode of cooking the rice to a just degree of consistency, seems taken from the Turks, who have a saying that rice, as a proof of being well drest, should be capable of being counted. You will recollect the importance attached to this grain by the Janissaries, whose rice-kettles serve as standards; and, in general, by the Turkish militia, which is recruited by parading them, and calling for the services of such as eat the rice of the Grand Signior. An almost equal degree of respect is attached to this food by the

Venetians, and it is a common thing, on hiring a Venetian maid-servant, for her to stipulate for a certain monthly salary, and her rice.

Another custom, derived from the long intercourse of Venice with Turkey, is the presenting coffee at visits. Neither do the Venetians yield to their masters in the manufacture of this beverage, the flavour of which depends much more on its mode of preparation than its quality;* and it is curious enough that England, where the

* The coffee consumed in the Levant is generally that of the West India islands; and though I have drunk it a thousand times in Turkey, as well at visits as at coffee-houses, I never but once had it even announced to me as of Mocha. This was on board the Capitán Pasha's ship, whose servant whispered the information with a sort of mysterious parade. Since I am on this subject, I should mention that a friend of mine, formerly commodore at Alexandria, was commissioned to procure a quantity of Mocha coffee, which was sent him across the desert, on camels, and carried by him, untouched, to Malta. It was there delivered over to the examination of coffee-sorters, who are to be found in that island; and these pronounced one fourth part to consist of a berry of another growth—so difficult is it to procure this fruit unadulterated. The coffee in Turkey, however, is excellent, because it is fresh-roasted, infused liberally, and drunk immediately. In England it is detestable, because it is often bought in powder, (and therefore probably adulterated,) or fried in fat, doled out by pinches, and let stand till it is acid. From the same cause (the

coffee-berry and the cacao-nut are to be had in perfection, should be the only country in Europe where the drink which is composed from them is unsufferable.

To return to a theme on which I have already touched, the strange fashions of food which have some how or other passed into use amongst different nations, whilst they are poison to their neighbours, from the *torta de lasagne* of Venice to the partridge and poultice of England; there seems to be but one general exception to this principle, which is the coupling bread, or some substitute for it, with meat—a practice which is,

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French usually make it over night) coffee, though better than in England, is never good in France.

Our custom of drinking cream or milk with it probably renders us so strangely indifferent to its flavour.

The passion of the Venetians for coffee-houses, in which men and women of all ranks delight, is generally known. There are, I think, twenty in St. Mark's Place alone. The best of these are adorned with great elegance, are covered with mirrors, and have handsome awnings before them in fine weather; and under these are assembled as many persons as in the room itself. This, according to the tone of the country, is open and undivided by partitions. Formerly, however, these shops savoured more of the aristocratical spirit of separation, being broken into large stalls like our own. But as this mitigated, long previous to the French revolution, these barriers also disappeared.

I believe, common to all nations that have grain, or farinaceous fruit or root, within their reach. But this fact does not prove that there is any natural standard of taste: For this union of bread and meat is not dictated by instinct, though in what it originates, except in the agreement of different countries in its wholesomeness, I know not. A strong proof of its not being dictated by instinct I have witnessed in Italian as well as English children, who are both trained with difficulty to the practice, and usually enticed into it by bonuses of beef and mutton. A whimsical confirmation, indeed, of my opinion was lately offered, by this place, in an old gentleman, who, not having been in infancy either beat or bribed into bread, never adopted it in after-life, continuing to his death a curious specimen of unsophisticated carrion. If his example makes against the notion of this use originating in instinct, it might also (as far as a single instance can tell) suggest some doubt of its necessity; for the carnivorous person lived long and merrily.

The present anecdote, and some others which I have not given you, and more particularly the having once seen a man eat melon with Spanish snuff, (a sight not singular, as I am told, in Italy,) have almost forced the conviction upon me, that

there is no such thing as a gamut for the palate. If you urge, in opposition, the general analogy of nature, I do not know what battle I can make; but if you attack me with the trite instance of the passion of young children for spirits, I shall observe that they soon grow out of it: and this, therefore, seems to prove nothing more than an early obtuseness of palate, which is gratified by any thing that is stimulating. And something analogous may be remarked in the young of other animals, as in puppy-dogs, who eat filth till they come to dog's estate, &c.

Having related the domestic uses of Christmas eve, there yet remain those of two other days to be described. The table of *Christmas day* is besieged by a much smaller circle than on the vigil of the feast, being, on the present occasion, only surrounded by the family, or those intimately connected with it. Here too there are dishes of prescription, though I never heard that any penalty was attached to the abstaining from them, as is the case in England. But as almost every superstition exists, in its whole or parts, all the world over, so this is also to be found here under the general head of *Moon*, who, as the arbitress of tides, is the great cause of all inexplicable effects. Hence a lower Venetian, who has no money in his pocket, at the appearance

of this planet, expects to remain without it till she has repaired her horns.

St. Stephen's day brings with it, I believe, little that is remarkable, except the general rush from all parts of Venice to the theatres, which, having been closed for a short time, re-open on that day. There seems to be as much superstition, indeed, as to being seen at the Opera, at the theatre of the *Fenice*, on that occasion, as is attached to eating the *torta de lasagne* on Christmas eve. The only intelligible attraction is that the Opera is always new; but as such, it must necessarily be deficient in the precision of its machinery. Notwithstanding such an objection, a box, on this night, cannot be had under five or, perhaps, ten guineas, which, three nights afterwards, may be procured for *one*—nay, at the interval of some weeks, at the price of fifteen pence, as I know from personal experience. If it is suspension of rank not to appear at the *Phœnix;* it is absolute forfeiture of cast not to be able to say that you were at some theatre or other; and, on the evening of St. Stephen, not a lady is to be found at home in Venice.

To take a long leap: the *Epiphany* is called here the *Epifanìa*, or *Befanìa*, indifferently; as if it took its name from the *Befana*—an odd sort of she-goblin, who is supposed to preside over

Twelfth-day. This is not distinguished by the ceremonies with which it is celebrated by us, though some of these were of Latin origin. The rites are propitiatory of the *Befana*, who seems to fill the same place here which the queen of the fairies formerly did in England. Children usually leave her a part of their supper, or, at least, a brown roll, (for she is supposed to prefer brown bread to white,) and a tumbler of wine. As a receptacle for the exchange of merchandize, they suspend a stocking in the kitchen, which is found, the next morning, filled with dirt, rubbish, and a few sweatmeats. I need not observe that the bread and wine disappear. At Rome a puppet, representing the *Befana*, is dressed up and hung with Christmas presents.

There is nothing here, that I am aware of, which is interesting in the scenic part of the religious functions of this festival, with the exception of the music of a mass, called *la Pastorale*, in commemoration of that with which our Saviour is supposed to have been saluted by the shepherds, and usually imitative of the sounds of the pastoral pipes. This, which is various in various churches, is always composed according to the principles of the old school. Its tone, on this solemn occasion, is much relished by the Italians, notwithstanding they are by no means fond of *ancient music*, having (as I should imagine

is the general disposition of man) much more sensibility to *melody* than *harmony*, and seldom pretending to a taste which they do not really possess.

You will not, I think, quarrel with me for stringing together the "auld world," as well as the newer stories of the place; the less so as all recollections of ancient Venice may be considered as things saved from the waters. The customs of the city have changed; her ports and channels are filling up, and her palaces are crumbling into ruins.* Yet a little, and Venice will be a Baby-Babylon, with the substitution of the gull for the bittern and the porpus for the fox. Should you be (as I believe) desirous of raking for riches amidst her rubbish, read the *Feste Veneziane*, lately published by *la Dama Renier Michièl*. This lady has, in her description of the Venetian festivals, put together much that is curious and interesting, and having formed a chaplet out of relics long trampled in the dirt, hung it up on the altars of her country, in a spirit that would not have misseemed the most illustrious of her ancestry.

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* The government, to stave off this evil, have prohibited the pulling down of houses, so that the possessors have not even the benefit of their ruins.

LETTER XLIX.

Other Festivals and Customs, &c.

Venice, January, 1818.

To one who hunts such game as I pursue, matter is never wanting. This small chace may be compared to bird-nesting, in a track, where there are nests in every bush. There is no scarcity of eggs—the difficulty lies in stringing them. Under the impression of this, I am tempted to interrupt the order of time, (rather than break the thread of my argument,) and to pursue the subject of my last Letter according to old recollections, though I shall greatly anticipate events.

The Carnival, though it is gayer or duller according to the genius of the nations which celebrate it, is, in its general character, nearly the same all over the peninsula. The beginning is like any other season; towards the middle you begin to meet masques and mummers in sunshine; in the last fifteen days the plot thickens; and during *the three last* all is hurly burly. But to paint these, which may be almost considered as a separate festival, I must avail myself of the

words of Messrs. William and Thomas Whistlecraft, in whose "prospectus and specimen of an intended national work," I find the description ready made to my hand, observing, that besides the ordinary *dramatis personæ*,

> "Beggars and vagabonds, blind, lame, and sturdy,
> Minstrels and singers, with their various airs,
> The pipe, the tabor, and the hurdy-gurdy,
> Jugglers and mountebanks, with apes and bears,
> Continue, from the first day to the third day,
> An uproar like ten thousand Smithfield fairs."

The shops are shut, all business is at a stand, and the drunken cries heard at night, afford a clear proof of the pleasures to which these days of leisure are dedicated.

These holidays may surely be reckoned amongst the secondary causes which contribute to the indolence of the Italian, since they reconcile this to his conscience as being of religious institution. Now there is, perhaps, no offence which is so unproportionably punished by conscience as that of indolence. With the wicked man, it is an intermittent disease; with the idle man, it is a chronic one.

On the first stroke of Lent, the sea is suddenly hushed, and not even a swell remains. This

season of peace and penitence is however interrupted by a very odd popular festival which takes place (according to our University slang) on the day that *term divides*. The origin of it seems lost; for, though common, in the greater part of Italy,* with some variety of circumstance, I never met with a person, from the professor to the barber, who could suggest any probable explanation. I shall describe it as it is performed in Venice.

A small stage, with a covering, is erected in the most spacious *campo* of the parishes, which celebrate the festival. Upon this appears the effigy of an old woman, and seated before her are two men, one habited as a notary, the other as a sort of military jack-pudding with a drawn sabre. These two eat and drink, and dispute about her fate, one being apparently the advocate and the other the accuser of the dame. This insists upon her being burnt; and that declares she shall be saved. An appeal is at length made to the people, who unanimously condemn her to the flames. At length, after some accessary games, such as running in sacks, swarming up

* There is, I believe, some sort of popular festival at this period in France.

a greased pole for fowls, flasks of wine, &c., lashed to the top, the figure is set fire to amidst a volley of squibs, and burnt, much as Guy Fawkes is with us.

There is little that is striking in what is termed *passion week* by us, and the *holy week* by the Italians, the week preceding this last being termed passion week here, and I suppose in other Catholic countries. I except one circumstance. Till the period of the Ascension, all clocks and bells are silenced; and I recollect that this principle was carried so far in Malta, that even the Governor, Sir Hildebrand Oakes's dinner bell was dismounted by the Maltese part of his establishment; a liberty which he had the good sense and good-nature to suffer, contrary to the usual habits of military chiefs.

It is impossible for me to go back in recollection to Malta, without observing the difference of colour which the Roman Catholic religion takes from the national character of the people amongst whom it is cultivated. I cannot look back on the Procession of Penitents in that island during the *settimana santa* without horror: whilst at Naples there is something of festive, even in the representation of those events, which seem least to admit such a character. I allude to the transparencies of the holy sepulchre ex-

hibited in different churches, and which are visited by numerous parties, in the spirit of pleasure, rather than of pilgrimage.

As usual, something of superstitious observance mingles in the meats of this, as well as of the other religious festivals. Our hot-cross-buns have an equivalent in cakes marked with a cross; and a lamb, or at least part of a roast lamb, is eat, (I suppose this is Jewish) as are also hard eggs, in every family of Italy, on Easter sunday.

LETTER L.

On the Discoveries of the early Venetians.

Venice, January, 1818.

I WENT yesterday to the public library for the purpose of looking at the famous *mappamondo* of *Frà Mauro*, a lion, which (strange to say!) I had never seen. When we consider the age in which this marvellous monument of science was constructed, and the circumstances which relate to it, it is impossible to refuse the Venetians a high place in the rank of discoverers. This singular work was composed, we know, about the middle of the fifteenth century; at a time when one should have thought that beyond what had been made out by the ancients, materials must have been absolutely wanting for such a work. Yet what anticipations of after-knowledge do we not find in it, and what a strange twilight must have broken upon Venice; though the daylight which followed was destined to other nations, till then sitting in darkness!

You are doubtless informed of the *Frà Mauro*'s having maintained the possibility of circumnavigating Africa, but are perhaps not aware of

the precise evidence (though *Tiraboschi* has written on the subject) which exists of his *mappamondo* having suggested to *Don Henry* of Portugal the very scheme which was, in the course of time, to arrest the progress of Venetian greatness. This fact has been put beyond the reach of doubt, by the Abbot *Zurla*, who has collected the most minute circumstances attending these transactions. *Zurla* has also illustrated the voyage of the *Zeni* to the north, which, it appears to me, can no more be considered fabulous than the travels of *Marco Polo*, and has thrown new light upon the singular discoveries of *Alvise di Cà da Mosto*.*

There is much scattered evidence of other early unpublished discoveries; and the commerce which these people carried on in the interior of Africa, at an early period of their history, is almost placed beyond doubt.

Conquest is always ruinous to knowledge. A part of the old Venetian documents were carried away to Milan, and those left are so crowded and disordered that it is impossible to

* Or *Alvisi of the house of Mosto*. Persons ignorant of the meaning of these terms have run them into one lump, and christened him *Cadamosto*.

refer to them; yet an imperfect list of a part of these confirms what I have just alluded to; I mean the interior African commerce of the Venetians, which appears to have been carried on by regular caravans.

May not, perhaps, the distant voyages which these people seem to have made, and the intercourse they had with remote nations, which can only explain the composition of the *mappamondo*, serve also to explain the odd prophecies and half lights respecting another world* that were afloat prior to the promises of the

"Nudo nocchier promettitor di regni?" †

Chiabrera.

Voltaire, with his usual flippancy, dismisses, you will recollect, the famous passage of *Dante*, as a mere accidental coincidence with truths afterwards established; and says the poet talked metaphorically, signifying the cardinal virtues by the four stars; and spoke of purgatory, and not of a real land. As to the first; *he* must have read *Dante* with very little attention who does not observe how often he speaks of things in a double sense; that is to say, in one real

* The same explanation may be given of the celebrated passage of Seneca.

† A scurvy skipper, promiser of crowns.

and figurative; and how accurate he was in applying his astronomical lights, according to the site in which he lays his scene. Nor was it extraordinary, that any one should at that period consider the islands in question as the actual purgatory. *Voltaire*, I believe, might have learned from the Fathers, with whom he affects so intimate an acquaintance, that Paradise occupied a certain defined situation; which is even assigned to it in the *mappamondo* of *Frà Mauro*. And why then should not one of the Western Islands have passed as well for the site of Purgatory, according to the notions at that time entertained? But a document indeed exists, which may throw more light on the probability of that for which I contend. *Pietro d'Abano*, a physician of celebrity, mentions in a letter, *Marco Polo*'s having delineated for him what was apparently one of the four stars of *Dante*. Now this man was cotemporary with the poet, who, you know, made a long residence at Venice.

The "*sit apud te honos antiquitati et fabulis quoque*" is an injunction which I feel in its full force; but I believe, that I am borne out by facts as well as fable in my reverence for the early Venetians, and in an opinion, which I entertain, that the early history of this country contains

curious matter in the branch of arts and sciences, which is not generally known; and that other nations have, in truth, only restored much which they imagine themselves to have invented.

In the "*Storia Civile e Politica del Commercio de' Veneziani,*" the author, a Venetian gentleman named *Carlo Antonio Marìn*, amidst a variety of proofs and presumptions of early Venetian discoveries, states that, in a visit to a convent, which he specifies, he saw a Crucifixion painted on glass, with the date of 1177.* He mentions also that the friend who shewed it him and who had analyzed the colours, maintained he had found oil in the composition. Dr. Johnson, no inaccurate examiner of evidence, in his life of *Frà Paolo Sarpi*, says: "By him *Acquapendente*, the great anatomist, confesses that he was instructed how vision is performed, and there are proofs that he was not a stranger to the circulation of the blood."

Let me add that, together with the obligations we have to this extraordinary people in the improvement of humble but more useful science, such as the introduction of precision into matters of trade,† &c. we have some, of a different

* The Venetians were perhaps (and probably in this instance) the depositaries of some of the arts of Constantinople.

† The mode of book-keeping by single and double entry, styled the Italian, undoubtedly originated with the Venetians.

character, which we probably little suspect. I allude to the first statute of *mortmain*, imitated from a Venetian law, enacting similar but stronger provisions, and known by the same denomination; *le leggi delle mani morte.*

In an act founded on this principle in 1767, I find the following preamble: "Con moltiplici leggi, e particolarmente con quelle del 1333, 1506, di questo maggior consiglio, e con l'altra 1605 del senato, si procurò d'impedire che li stabili di questa città e di questo stato non vadano negli ecclesiastici e cause pie per via di legati, &c. &c. &c."

It is true that this principle of law was adopted early, and very universally; I believe (though you will know best) with the exception of the Roman State, and I find it recognized in the statutes of Milan, when under the dominion of her dukes. Still no precise act upon the subject dates from so early a period as the first of Venice.

Many Venetian words naturalized in England (to say nothing of corresponding idioms) attest the great communication we must once have had with Venice. Take, for instance, *flema*, in our common English signification phlegm, which is in this sense called *pituita* in Italian; *slepa* a slap, *bullo* a bully, *artichoco* an artichoke, (remark the ch is pronounced as with us) *spienza* the spleen, &c. &c.

LETTER LI.

Notions of Delicacy comparative amongst different Nations.

Venice, January, 1818.

I DINED yesterday with a Venetian friend who had been in England and brought from thence various English habits and indulgences. Amongst others, the usual after-piece of coffee and *liqueur* was followed by the introduction of the tea-table, with all its customary artillery. After a minute inspection, and inquiry into the uses of the several pieces composing this battery, we arrived at the slop-basin, when the lady of the house, herself untravelled, shrugged up her shoulders and turning to me, observed that, "all English as I was, even *I* must allow the indelicacy of this receptacle of leavings." I should perhaps have attempted to say something in its favour but that I had seen in her hands the "*Quinze jours à Londres*," and knew I should next have to plead the part of a vessel of yet greater abomination. So I abandoned our crockery-creed, and silently acquiesced in all the reproaches

which were bestowed on the least offensive part of our establishment.

Nothing is perhaps more amusing than to observe how arbitrary are all notions of refinement, and how generally a nation which taunts another with an offensive habit, is reproached by the accused, for some equivalent piece of indelicacy.

A foreigner once told me he was warned by an English lady of the impropriety of blowing his nose overtly in the presence of the sex; but observed, at the same time, that he had detected many of our fine ladies in secret sniffs: A remark that brings to my recollection a circumstance which will not be misplaced in this chapter of comparative nosology. Seeing an Italian lady once examine the seam of her pocket-handkerchief, I asked her, indiscreetly enough, what she was about, and she answered that the difference of the two borders served her as a rule for the side on which she blew her nose. I do not know whether this piece of ultra-delicacy was personal, provincial, or peninsular, but am certain that there is no woman in England who does not ten times a day volunteer the forced penance of a puppy dog.

You will, I am sure, recollect the *tirade*, in Sterne's Sentimental Journey, upon national in-

tolerance, arising out of an anecdote of a similar description. But what sermon, or satire could reform this uncharitable spirit? springing, as it does, out of that general principle of

> "Indulging vices we're inclin'd to,
> And damning those we have no mind to."

LETTER LII.

Visit to Bassano, &c.

Valdagno, May, 1818.

It is so long since I have written to you, that I scarcely know how to break myself in anew to the task. The fact is that, not to speak of other things which interrupted my labours, I had really exhausted all I had to say.

I thought indeed that some excursions, made by me early in the spring, when I broke cover from Venice, in the impatience for green fields and birds and beasts, might have furnished me with something new, but this not being the case, I determined to wait till time should produce matter for a letter. You may perhaps think that the same motive for silence exists, after reading the present.

I had been often pressed by a gentleman, who makes *Bassano* his summer residence, to visit him in his country-quarters, and this scheme I at last accomplished in company with a small party, with whom I set out from Padua. The road from this place to *Bassano* presents the usual features of Lombard scenery, but appears as if preparing itself to be magnificent in pro-

portion as it approaches the great gorge of the Tyrolian Alps.

I could have wished to have had some of our English acquaintance with me on this occasion: I mean some of those who echo the charge of the want of hospitality in Italy, (because it does not run in the same channels as in England,) and complain that they have housed and fed Italians,

> " Sed contra accipiunt meros amores,
> Seu quid suavius elegantiusve est."*
>
> *Catullus.*

Not having announced our intention, the head of the family was from home, being gone to welcome the Austrian Viceroy at *Verona.* His sister, however, insisted we should stay till his return, and in the mean time, as we afterwards discovered, dispatched an express to inform him of our arrival. He accordingly returned the day after.

There was now no possibility of a speedy escape; nor, to say the truth, were we very desirous to effect it.

The house where we found ourselves had a large and pleasant garden behind it, and was in

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* But were with empty graces paid;
Mere kindness—lights and lemonade.

the centre of *Bassano*, a city of about the size of Southampton, and containing probably 8,000 souls. It is at first a matter of surprize to an Englishman, that a rich landed proprietor should establish himself in a town, or always in something approaching to it; but various reasons, some of which I have detailed in a former letter, naturally lead to this. Not to repeat those which I formerly adduced, personal security from robbers is not amongst the least, a consideration which weighs, more or less, all over the peninsula. Another is the impossibility of being well supplied with provisions, except in populous places.

You will be disposed to ask me whether this does not apply equally to England. I say No, and will illustrate the difference by a recent anecdote. After having fed on carrion, or having fasted rather than feed on carrion, for a long while in *Abano*, I asked the cook if he could not get me a piece of meat from Padua; he told me that he would venture it now and then; but that he could not practise *this contraband* often, as the local guard of the village, if they detected him, would confiscate the venture. For on the same principle* my Paduan

* See an early letter from Padua.

friend could not in town have meat from the country, *I*, living in the country, could not have meat from a town, within whose limits I did not happen to be situated. The explanation of this was that the farmer of the meat-tax of *Abano* would have suffered had meat been purchased at any other place, and it was therefore a violation of law in us the tenants of the hospital, or in the inhabitants at large, to supply ourselves at any other place. The consequences of this system are obvious; but its most disagreeable effects are confined to small villages, as in towns competition secures attention to the customer.

But if the country has its dangers and inconveniences, the city is not exempt from the last. On going over my friend's premises I was surprized to find his best entrance blocked up; when he explained this, by telling me he did it to separate from his family an officer, who was in possession of that part of the house. As I knew that there was only a squadron of cavalry in Bassano, I was somewhat surprized at the information; and still more when informed that the officer had possessed himself of his quarters without the form of an order from the civil power, which even here assigns them in detail, though obliged to comply with the military re-

quisition, in the gross. My friend added, that being of the municipality, he might indeed get redress, but in that case he should provoke the enmity of a man capable of avenging himself in a thousand ways, and who would probably hand down the quarrel to his successors.

Such evils, however, as these are small in comparison with what *Bassano* had to suffer during the war. The country was wasted about it in every direction, and it latterly sustained the loss of its bridge, a most serious evil, in places where a river is not navigable: For the Brenta,

" un fiume
Che verso il vicin mar cheto si move,"

in this place rushes along

" gonfio e bianco già di spume,
Per neve sciolta, e per montane piove."*
Ariosto.

This river was here once spanned by a beautiful bridge of *Palladio*'s: destroyed by one of those dreadful floods which these Alpine waters occa-

* ———— a stream which, far from home,
Glides slowly to the neighbouring sea, in quiet;
But works and whitens here with froth and foam,
And swoln with snows and mountain-rain runs riot.

sionally pour down, bearing with them trees and masses of timber, which no structure can resist. To the Palladian bridge was substituted another in wood; the work of *Remondi*, whom *Algarotti*, in his *Saggio sopra l'Architettura*, I think, terms the Archimedes of Italy. This, reputed one of the most curious monuments of mechanism, was destined to be destroyed by another element: It was burned by the Viceroy, *Eugene Beauharnois*, in his retreat from Italy: a piece of mischief, from which he would undoubtedly have refrained, had he known how much *law* would have been granted him by his pursuers.

But it is time I should say something of the town: this is best seen, together with the circumjacent country, from the house of the archpriest, which is situated on an eminence, and was once the residence of

"Ezzelino, immanissimo tiranno."*

From this place the view is very striking; for there are indeed few Italian cities so singularly situated as *Bassano*, which is built upon a high promontory winding into what *was* apparently once a lake, through the deserted bed of

* Of Ezzelin, that most inhuman tyrant.

which runs the Brenta, many feet below the level of the town.

In such a case it is impossible not to start a theory: the most obvious seems to be that the river having forced the mountain defile, had, at the first opening of the gorge, expanded its waters into a natural bowl, capable of containing them, but that one of the sides of this, no longer patient of the pressure from behind, had given way, and the stream, bursting through the aperture, drained off the waters of the lake. Something like this seems to have caused the subalpine lake of *Como*, and that of *Isèo*, between *Brescia* and *Bergamo*; but in these, either from the descent being less rapid, or some other cause, only the superfluous waters are carried off, the lake remaining and the river issuing out of the side, opposite to that by which it entered. So much for my theory, which you may either adopt or batter down at pleasure.

Though the general appearance of *Bassano* is curious, I know not that it contains much in art which might interest in detail. There are however some fresco paintings by *Jacopo da Ponte*, known by picture-mongers under the name of *Bassano*, this town being, in fact, his birth-place: The most striking circumstance respecting them (a thing however by no means

uncommon) is the proof they exhibit of his change of style; he having begun as an imitator of the Perugian school, (as may be seen in his *Flight into Egypt*, preserved, I think, in the Town-hall,) and grown original in the exercise of his art.

There are also many casts of *Canova*'s contained in the *Rezzonico* palace, with a laudatory inscription more happily imagined than the papal decree, which ranks him with Phidias and Praxiteles. This silly hope to prescribe to posterity is no new attempt on the part of Rome; and the favours are not forgot which were profusely lavished by pope, prelates, and people, on the Chevalier *Bernini*. The omen can hardly be very flattering to the Marquis of *Ischia*.

I cannot help returning for a moment to the fresco paintings, which, fresh or faded, make the ornament of so many Italian towns. I remember seeing one on the outside of a house, in a mountain village, which would not have discredited *Perugino* himself. There is nothing which more attests the ancient magnificence of this people when "wealth was theirs," than these remnants of art. To such too may be added their relics in architecture, which are as common: and I have counted six buildings,

fairly called palaces, in the miserable town of *Valdagno*.

But to return to *Bassano:* Its vicinities are much more interesting than the town itself, or any thing which is contained in it. Mounting the *Brenta*, or rather its banks, (for, as I have said, it is not here navigable,) you see, every where, though less marked, the features of the Tyrol. A few miles up the stream you are presented with a very curious phenomenon: This is the *Olliero*, which rushes into it at about the distance of half a mile from its sources, in such a body as to communicate its own clear colour to one half of the turbid *Brenta*, and for a considerable distance. This river, indeed, which rises from two springs, one very picturesquely situated within a cavern, bursts out in such a volume as to be capable of floating a lighter at either source.

A fact (more curious in natural history) is that though the mountains throughout their whole range on the western side of the *Brenta* contain *trap*, none is to be found throughout an immense distance, I believe more than 1000 miles, on the eastern. But I hear you ask me how long I have been up to trap? I answer, "*Non meus hic sermo.*" It is that of my host, who, I would have you to know, is a mighty mineralogist, and complimented as such by *Brocchi*,

who speaks of his collection of specimens of Italian rocks, as of the best, whether public or private, in the peninsula.

The province of Bassano, though rich in picturesque scenes and natural wonders, is (as may be conjectured) less fertile than the plains of Italy. One sack of wheat, for instance, is said to yield little more than three, and the maize cannot be cultivated. Still this (as every where else throughout the peninsula) is only comparative sterility. Wine and oil, wood, herbage, and silk, are produced in abundance, and tobacco is cultivated with success, (if such a stricture may be permitted from an Englishman) notwithstanding the perverse regulations of the government. Respecting these, it is enough to say, that whilst on one side the *Brenta*, the growth of this plant is permitted permanently, it is only suffered for three years on the other; whilst all must be delivered at a fixed price to the government. This sends it in a raw state to Venice, where it is worked up, and distributed in other provinces: so that a Bassanese cannot buy tobacco of his own growth, which is sold in *Friuli* and its dependencies. He must go to Vicenza, if he has occasion for any. Another plant which is produced in singular perfection here is the asparagus. I see you laugh at the supposition of a particular soil being requisite

for the culture of what you will say can be had good at a small expense in an artificial one. Yet, I can assure you, Covent Garden never turned out such delicious asparagus as *Bassano*. But the nature of the soil (whatever value our gardeners may attach to it) is of much more importance in Italy than in England: for horticulture, like all useful arts, is a century in arrear throughout the peninsula. As for all artificial vegetables, as tame-mushrooms, (for instance) these are things never heard of, the Italians usually contenting themselves with the great red umbrella toad-stool, of which there are two species, one wholesome, and the other poisonous, or recurring only to the fields for others.

As to the principles of succession, though they might, no doubt, be reduced to practice in shaded and well-watered places, (no country offering such means of irrigation) even these, and many more are imperfectly understood. It is true that in the neighbourhood of the populous cities of Rome, Venice, &c. the exertions of the inhabitants, in some degree, second the happy dispositions of the climate, and the fruits of the earth are plentiful *in due season*. But this is not the case where labour is not equally goaded. *Valdagno*, for example, is frequented, during four months in the year, as Tunbridge is with

us, yet roots and herbage are almost as scarce there, as bulbs in Africa during the dry season.

I told a servant I had brought with me, who was a native of this province, to ask if it was not possible to have some carrots with my beef; and he returned laughing, and said the waiter did not know what a carrot was. Recollecting the precedent of the sultan in Mr. Beloe's Oriental Tales, who bade his vizir bring him a man who did not know what *canaffee* was, I sent for him, and only by dint of description succeeded in making him understand what I wanted. I mentioned a nearly similar instance of barbarity at *Abano*, a bathing-place yet more thronged than *Valdagno*.

If horticulture be a fair test of the progress of useful civilization, Italy has at present advanced no farther than England had at the time of the revolution: I now, however, waver in a former opinion, and am inclined to believe she was once more advanced, as well in the useful as in the finer arts, and that her present disease is a relapse. I might cite various facts in confirmation of this from the work of *Filiasi su' primi e secondi Veneti, &c.* where may be found many proofs of useful arts and sciences once successfully cultivated in this part of Italy.

Whilst the advantages which the Bassanese, a mountain territory, holds out to the cultivator,

are such as I have described, there are other, and not less essential, temptations to the stranger. In the south of Italy you can only escape the excessive heats by taking refuge on the top of the Apennines, where there is an absence of all other comforts but that of cool; and I was informed at Rome, that the late Bishop of Bristol used always to run up *Mount Radicofani* in the summer months. Such extra-episcopal activity is not necessary in Lombardy, from the vicinity of the Alps; and Bassano, and the place whence I date, both situated at the foot of the mountains, afford a striking instance of this. You have indeed occasionally excessive heat for about eight hours, that is, from ten in the morning till six in the evening; but the air is usually elastic, and the remainder of the four-and-twenty cool. This is a great delight in southern climates, where the heat of the evening or the night is the only real and irreparable evil. This is no doubt to be attributed to the Alpine rivers, which produce a delicious freshness, and more still to the prevalence of the bracing winds which come iced from the mountains, and give check-mate to the *scirocco*.

I gave you some account of the waters of *Recoaro*, in a letter from Vicenza. Taken at the fountain, which is at a short distance from

this place, they are yet more efficacious, as well as palatable. The effects I have seen produced by them are really marvellous: Thus, I remember a man when I was last in Italy, who was suffering cruelly under a liver-complaint, and who, judging from his looks, I did not imagine could have outlived the year; I found him this winter, to my infinite surprize, in health and spirits: he informed me he had undergone a *thorough repair* at *Recoaro;* but, it should be added, his resuscitation was not the work of a single visit, but that of a spring and autumn's course repeated for two years.

These waters are of the nature of those of Pyrmont.

I ought not to conclude this letter without mentioning a circumstance I observed on my journey from Bassano to Valdagno, which leads to some considerations on one of the natural plagues of Italy, and the means which have been suggested for its relief. The *Agno*, which gives its name to this place, like many other rivers, often breaks its bounds; but furnishes a remedy for its own excesses, depositing copiously a rich vegetable soil, which serves at length as a barrier against itself. Observing the effects of one of its floods, I took the trouble to ascertain what time had been required (taking advantage

of the works it had itself thrown up) to re-confine it to its bed. I was answered "Twelve years."

Now it is to be remarked that the *Agno* is very little above the level of the circumjacent country; whilst many other rivers absolutely overlook it. The *Pò*, for instance, I should say, had in some places raised its channel as much above the lands through which it flows, as the Thames has *his* near Dagenham breach.

I mention this, because a very strange project has been broached by some foreign engineers, and treated out of Italy with more respect than it appears to me to deserve. These are for letting loose the rivers, that, by depositing the matter suspended in them, they may raise the neighbouring country to the height of their banks; and thus apply a radical cure to the evil of inundations, necessarily frequent in the peninsula.

The circumstances however which I have mentioned, will, I think, shew the extravagance of this idea. For if twelve years were necessary to reduce the *Agno* to order, which is a brook in comparison with the *Pò* of Lombardy, what time must elapse before *his* enormous volume of water could be poured back into his channel? Nor would the evil be confined to deluging and

poisoning* provinces for a century. The dreadful consequences would remain after the cause of mischief was removed: for the *Pò* and some other rivers, instead of depositing malm, (as the *Agno* does) carry with them rubble and sand wherever they wander, and form an upper stratum of absolute rubbish.

The only practicable remedy appears to me to be a good system of engineering, which is carried on here, I should suspect, often upon an inefficient scale and foundation, and differs, like so many other things in Italy, at the distance of every few miles. The Italians have however an answer to the reproach of the want of system in this case, and say the various character of their rivers demands a varied scheme of defence.

Whether this be a real justification of the diversity of modes and *materials* which they bring to bear upon the enemy, or whether it arises from the strange want of concert which, as I have frequently said, marks the different districts of the peninsula, I really cannot venture to decide.

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* The *malaria* is often produced by the outbreak of a river and the deposition of its stagnant waters, as at *Caldiero* in the Veronese, &c.

LETTER LIII.

Journey homewards.—Milan.

Paris, 1818.

After having conducted you (to say nothing of devious excursions) half-way from one end of the great Alpine chain to the other, I shall not think it necessary to carry you back as regularly to my point of exit: since a great part of the way has been already trod, and what has *not*, resembles so much what *has*, that I shall let you off with a few observations on the two great cities which lie upon this route.

Milan, the first of these, is large, and situated on a plain, and is what, I suppose, would be called a fine city: But it has nothing very striking either within or without to recommend it. Add that it is hot in summer, foggy in the fall, and cold in the winter.

I know not whether it is to be attributed to these its disadvantages; but what Alfieri says of the perfection of the plant man in Italy, certainly does not apply to Milan; for I think I never saw

such a number of deformed and diminutive wretches in any city of Europe. This is not an observation peculiar to myself, for it has been remarked upon by *Ugo Foscolo* in a note to his translation of Sterne's Sentimental Journey, and I recollect once counting nearly sixty in two days. This leads me to an observation which applies generally in the peninsula. I never saw deformity or infirmity excite a smile. Italy is, I believe, the only country in Europe which is free from this brutality. I have witnessed it in England and Germany, and France.

Mishapen objects, though more common in Milan, are also to be found in the neighbouring towns, both on *plain and hill*, and spread into the confines of the Venetian State, where they are almost lost. I do not know to what one should ascribe this local tendency to deformity. Is it a defect of race, running through the descendants of the Gallic subalpine tribes, as one might almost be led to conjecture from its stopping, or all but stopping, at those of the ancient *Veneti?* As a confirmation of such a guess, the absence of deformity forms the characteristic of some nations, and I never saw a misshapen person in Greece.

As in the Milanese, man is often cut short of his fair personal proportions, so I should say

that he was behind all the other Italians in mental qualifications, being ordinarily heavy, and slow of understanding. The person however who will form the subject of my next Letter, may serve as a brilliant exception to this opinion.

LETTER LIV.

On the Poetry of Parini—state of Manners in Italy, as influenced by the Government.

Paris, September, 1818.

You will, I am sure, recollect charging me to give you my thoughts on the poetry of *Parini*, the great luminary of the city I have just described, in whose neighbourhood he was born, which was long his residence, and which now contains his ashes.

When I alleged the difficulties which such a task presented to a foreigner, you answered that you wanted to see him measured by a foreign standard—by the judgment of an Englishman. It is upon this ground only that I speak of a man, who is perhaps of all the Italian writers least amenable to the bar of a tramontane tribunal. If I therefore venture to pronounce sentence upon him, it will be, always in allowing him the benefit of an appeal.

Parini is to be considered in the double capacity of a lyric and a satyrical poet. In the first

light, he is looked upon in the peninsula as a great reformer, or at least example, of the Italian school; the diction of *Guidi*, &c. not enjoying that unquestioned credit in Italy, which it has acquired amongst the few cultivators of Italian poetry at home.

To this style he has substituted a much chaster and more natural character of expression. If we allow, therefore, weight to the position of *Alfieri*, who asserts that, in lyric poetry, expression is every thing, *Parini* has accomplished no ordinary enterprize. But of all styles of diction, that in which this author excels is perhaps the least likely to take with foreigners. Its character is elegant simplicity. Now if it requires no common sense of the beautiful to enjoy the "numbers which Petrarch flowed in," respecting whom I might perhaps say, that

> "Io nol soffersi molto, nè si poco,
> Ch' io nol vedessi sfavillar d'intorno
> Qual ferro che bollente esce del fuoco," *
>
> *Il Paradiso.*

it asks a yet steadier sight to distinguish the lights of *Parini*—I will say a more refined

---

* I gaz'd not yet so dazzled or so darkling,
But what I saw him flame and flash like steel
Snatch'd freshly from the forge, red-hot and sparkling,

taste and more exercised judgment to weigh those nice combinations of expression, which are recommended rather by their delicacy than their brilliance.

I shall not however make a hash out of what Italian critics have written upon *Parini*, though they might minister materials for an elaborate essay; nor dwell even in details of my own on his lyrics, which I just feel enough to feel that I do not feel them as I ought. I shall nevertheless not pass over the most popular work of this author, which, though distinguished both by exquisite beauties of rhythm and of diction, has other merits that a foreigner is perhaps somewhat better qualified to appreciate. This effort of his muse, in the

"canti
Che il Lombardo pungean Sardanapalo,"*
Ugo Foscolo.

is, though little known in England, more likely to be esteemed there, than his lyrical flights. It is a poem in blank verse, divided into parts, and entitled *Il Mattino, il Mezzodì, e, la Sera.*

This, to define it in a business-like-way, is descriptive of a day's work in dandyism, or may

* The strain which stung the Lombard Sybarite,

be considered as a calendar, ironically didactive of Italian foppery. Such a scheme does not promise much, but the immediate subject is not kept rigorously in view, serving principally to thread and hold together a series of digressions, which spring happily out of the subject and as easily subside into it.

In this, *Parini* resembles *Cowper* in his *Task*, and indeed in many points of detail; as in his sneering tone of satire, in his picturesque descriptions, his precision, where there is a question of any thing mechanical, in the adoption of a species of blank verse between the familiar and the dignified, which was new in the language of each, and in a diction happily adapted to the vehicle he has chosen. But here the advantage is greatly on the side of *Parini*. In more essential points I should give it to the Englishman. Thus, though *Cowper* is caustic as *Parini*, he sneers only by starts, and does not fatigue you with that eternal drone of irony which predominates in the music of the Italian; this stop being heard above all others and often drowning the sweetness of his softer tones. He rises much above the other too in some yet more important respects. There is a tone of feeling in *Cowper*, which *Parini* never reaches, and which, were verse to be measured by its depth

of passion, would place our countrymen first among the poets of the day.

But our business is with *Parini*. A slight view of the *Mattino* will serve to give a loose notion of his design. The first part begins with an ironical exhortation to the Dandy, with respect to the distribution of his time. Then follow the occupations of the day, all told in the same strain, and unenlivened, as in other comic poets, by a single sally of frank and good humoured gaiety. The digressions in short are the only part that please me. Some of these are indeed delightful, but they are always so in proportion as they lose sight of the subject. I am disposed to select one as a specimen of the poetry. He has been describing the duties of *Sirventismo*, for the origin of which he accounts in the following lines.

Tempo già fu, che il pargoletto Amore
Dato era in guardia al suo fratello Imene;
Poichè la Madre lor temea, che il cieco
Incauto Nume perigliando gisse
Misero e solo per oblique vie,

Time was the little Love, scarce fledg'd and creeping,
Was put into his brother Hymen's keeping;
For much the Mother fear'd the graceless God
Might stray or come to mischief, if he trod

E che, bersaglio agl' indiscreti colpi
Di senza guida e senza freno arciero,
Troppo immaturo al fin corresse il seme
Uman, ch' è nato a dominar la terra.
Perciò la prole mal secura all' altra
In cura dato avea, sì lor dicendo:
"Ite o figli del par; tu più possente
Il dardo scocca, e tu più cauto il guida
A certa meta." Così ognor compagna
Iva la dolce coppia, e in un sol regno
E d' un nodo comun l'alme stringea.
Allora fu che il Sol mai sempre uniti
Vedea un pastore ed una pastorella
Starsi al prato, a la selva, al colle, al fonte;
E la Suora di lui vedeali poi
Uniti ancor nel talamo beato,
Ch' ambo gli amici numi a piene mani
Gareggiando spargean di gigli e rose.

The world alone, and man's imperial race
In his first fury perish from their place.
So putting him beneath his brother's care,
She, with this lesson, launched the little pair:
"Go, peers in power! *You*, strongest, ply the dart,
To guide it, Hymen, be thy sager part."
She ended, and the brothers rang'd their round,
And in close couples souls and bodies bound.
'Twas then that never sun beheld a swain
And shepherdess together on the plain,
By field, or fountain, or by bosky bourn,
But that his sister, in her nightly turn,
Saw them together laid in lowly shed,
While the young Gods rain'd roses on their bed.

Ma chè non puote anco in divino petto,
Se mai s' accende, ambizi-on di regno?
Crebber l'ali ad Amore a poco e poco,
E la forza con esse; ed è la forza
Unica e sola del regnar maestra.
Perciò a poc' aere prima, indi più ardito
A vie maggior fidossi, e fiero alfine,
Entrò nell' alto, e il grande arco crollando
E il capo, risonar fece a quel moto
Il duro acciar che la faretra a tergo
Gli empie, e gridò: "Solo regnar vogl' io,"
Disse, e volto a la madre; "Amore, adunque
"Il più possente infra gli Dei, il primo
Di Citerèa figliuol, ricever leggi,
E dal minor german ricever leggi
Vile alunno, anzi servo? Or dunque Amore
Non oserà fuoreh' una unica volta

But what will not ambition? By degrees
Love's pinions push'd, and with the growth of these
Fast grew the stripling's strength (and stories shew)
Force is the single source of power below.
First in shoal air he play'd and narrow rings;
At last more bold confiding in his wings,
Flung his steel case of sounding shafts behind,
Brandish'd his bow, and, borne upon the wind,
Bounc'd into baby rage; and cried with scorn;
"First of the Gods, and Venus' elder born,
Shall I then, like a pupil, wait command,
—Say *slave*—and at a younger brother's hand?—

Ferire un' alma come questo schifo
Da me vorrebbe? E non potrò giammai
Dappoi ch' io strinsi un laccio, anco slegarlo
A mio talento, e qualor parmi un altro
Stringerne ancora? E lascerò pur ch'egli
Di suoi unguenti impeci a me i miei dardi
Perchè men velenosi e men crudeli
Scendano ai petti? Or via perchè non togli
A me da le mie man quest' arco, e queste
Armi da le mie spalle, e ignudo lasci,
Quasi rifiuto degli Dei, Cupido?
Oh il bel viver che fia qualor tu solo
Regni in mio loco! Oh il bel vederti, lasso!
Studiarti a torre da le languid' alme
La stanchezza e'l fastidio, e spander gelo

—Not twice with his good will one bosom strike?
Nor loose the knot once fasten'd, as I like?
Nor, at my riper pleasure tie another?
And shall this squeamish, sober-blooded brother
Sheathe with his balsams my wide wasting dart,
That it may rankle less within the heart?
No; bid me rather here at once deliver
Mine arms, despoil me of my bow and quiver;
And leave me stript and helpless to all eyes,
The scorn of men and outcast of the skies.
What a rare world 'twill be, when thou shalt reign
In place of Cupid! I behold thee strain
To light in languid souls some faint desire,
And see thee scatter frost instead of fire.

Di foco in vece! Or, Genitrice, intendi,
Vaglio e vo' regnar solo. A tuo piacere
Tra noi parti l'impero; ond' io con teco
Abbia omai pace, e in compagnia d'Imene
Me non trovin mai più le umane genti."
Qui tacque Amore, e minaccioso in atto,
Parve all' Idalia Dea chider risposta.
Ella tenta placarlo, e pianti e preghi
Sparge, ma in vano; onde a' due figli volta,
Con questo dir pose al contender fine.
" Poichè nulla tra voi pace esser puote,
Si dividano i regni. E perchè l'uno
Sia dall' altro germano ognor disgiunto,
Sieno tra voi diversi e'l tempo e l'opra.
Tu che di strali altero a fren non cedi

But mark me, Mother, I *can* reign alone,
And *will;* I'll bear no brother near the throne.
Then, at thy pleasure, portion our domain;
Give each his lot; and so shall I remain
At peace with thee, while we our interests sever,
And Love and Hymen make divorce for ever."
He ended, and with threatening act and eye,
Appear'd to wait the Goddess's reply;
She sobs and sighs with fond entreaties mixt,
But read his part resolv'd, his purpose fixt.
Then, hopeless to remove such settled hate,
With this short sentence stopt all new debate.
" Since you can't rule like brothers in the realm,
In fair rotation, take and quit the helm.
Diverse your task and times.—Wild Archer, smite

L'alme ferisci, e tutto il giorno impera:
E tu che di fior placidi hai corona,
Le salme accoppia, e coll' ardente face
Regna la notte." Ora di qui, Signore,
Venne il rito gentil, che a' freddi sposi
Le tenebre concede e de le spose
Le caste membra: E a voi, beata gente
Del più nobil mondo, il cor di queste
E il dominio del dì largo destina.
Fors' anco un dì più liberal confine
Vostri diritti avran, se Amor più forte
Qualche provincia al suo germano usurpa:
Così giova sperar. Tu volgi intanto
A' miei versi l'orecchio, ed odi or quale
Cura al mattin tu debbi aver di lei
Che spontanea o pregata a te donossi

The soul with *your* keen shafts, and rule in light.
You of the kindled torch and saffron flower
Bind bodies, and be thine the midnight hour!"
And hence, egregious Sir, the gentle rite
Which to cold husbands yields the shades of night,
And spousal corpse; while you more happy sway
The heart, and hold dominion of the day.
Add (and the thing's within the reach of fate)
That Love, usurping on his brother's State,
May win his wilful liegemen wider scope;
At least, we'll feast our fancy with the hope.
And now, illustrious youth, incline thine ear
To my didactive strain, and studious hear

Per tua dama quel dì lieto che a fida
Carta non senza testimonj furo
A vicenda commessi i patti santi
E le condizi-on del caro nodo, &c.

Though the extract which I have given, may, as I have said, serve as a favourable specimen of the general tone of Parini's poetry, it is not to be considered as a flattering test of the execution, either with respect to rhythm or expression, which are both as nicely laboured throughout as in this short effort of his fancy. The poem is indeed a painting in ivory, wrought with a delicacy and precision of which perhaps no model could be found in any language in Europe.

The original however of the miniature (Parini copied from a living model) was so little satisfied with his portrait that he had the poor *Abbé* bastinadoed, a mode of retort by no means unusual in ancient Italy; where vengeance was often carried to severer lengths, and usually with impunity.

Since I am on this subject, another anecdote may throw more light on the state of justice in

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What morning cares await thee with the dame,
Who, woo'd or willing, partner of thy flame,
(Nor was the knot unwitness'd which you join'd)
With thee, to mutual duties seal'd and sign'd, &c.

the peninsula previous to its conquest by France, and might alone plead the cause of the Italians with those nations who have steered,

Con miglior corso, *e con migliore stella.**
Il Paradiso.

A young man of education and hitherto unblemished life, residing in a frontier city, received, from a powerful noble, such an outrage as rendered life intolerable, and which he at last revenged in a manner which was scarcely less odious than the injury he had received.

This story was told to me and another Englishman who, as well as myself, expressed his horror at the wrong as well as the revenge. "Why did not he challenge the offender?" said my companion.—"Because he would have been amenable to justice, and punished for his *presumption.*"—"Why not keep his horse ready saddled, pistol his enemy, and escape over the frontier?"—"Because he would have left his family subject to the persecution of that of the miscreant whose life he had taken."

Is any thing more required to explain the popular reproach bestowed on this people, and can any thing more forcibly demonstrate the falsity of the position, that the influence of tyranny

* A better course *beneath a better star.*

falls merely on those within its immediate reach, and that its evils,

"To men, remote from power but rarely known,
Leave reason, faith, and conscience, all our own?"

I said in a former letter from Vicenza, that French justice had extinguished that class of enormities the most flagrant of which was assassination. It certainly did so; and during the first visit I made to Italy, I did not hear a single instance of the kind, even in provinces such as Piedmont, where the vivacity and ferocity of the national character led most to such excesses.*

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* Nothing could be more ridiculous than the wonderment excited at home by the attempt to assassinate the Duke of Cumberland. Yet the circumstances of the murder of the unfortunate *D'Antraigues* which followed at no long interval, might have sufficiently explained the spirit in which it was perpetrated.

If a Piedmontese *of the old school* once bit his thumb at you, (no matter how slight the provocation,) accompanying it with "Tu me la pagherai!" a sentence generally pronounced aside, the words were a death-warrant, and the action its seal.

It was for this reason that many other Italians would not employ them as servants, and I remember one being refused as a cook at Milan, on the sole ground of his being a Piedmontese; though, be it added, they are the very best cooks in the peninsula.

It is due to the Austrian government to say, that Lombardy is yet free from such horrors; but the tragedy is getting up in other parts of the peninsula and will probably take as deep a dye as before. Turin, indeed, and Naples have already furnished a prelude such as affords a dreadful earnest of what is to come.

Not to shift my scene, I confine myself to the former metropolis. A noble, as I am informed by an Englishman fresh from Turin, no later than this spring, upon some real or imaginary provocation, shot a very respectable citizen, and has since been untouched by justice.

Such is the morality of a pious monarch who has established a kitchen inquisition in his dominions! In these you may do murder, but you must not eat flesh on a Friday.* The dreadful storm which so long raged in Europe and devastated her most fertile provinces, at least brought with it the consolation of its having cleared the air of some impurities; but the noxious exhalations and the reptiles are returned.

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* His maximum on meat, rigidly enforced in Piedmont, will do more towards forcing fasts than the host of spies whose reports shut out the carnivorous from the favours and protection of the court.

LETTER LV.

Turin and general Italian Recollections.

Paris, September, 1818.

TURIN, the last city of Italy towards the French frontier, affords a striking contrast to Milan. It is an elegant and uniformly built city, with all its streets at right angles, and affording some general recollection of Bath, though very different both in its localities and in the details of its architecture.

A city built upon this principle of uniformity is very pretty in theory, but in practice seldom produces the pleasing effect of irregularity; for the same reason that Portland-place does not afford the same gay and pleasing prospect as Pall Mall.

Throughout nature the picturesque triumphs over the beautiful.

Beyond the mere exterior of Turin I have little to communicate. When one arrives at the threshold of Italy, one is always in a hurry either to get in or to get out; and, as to my own personal experience, I know as little of the

state of manners in Piedmont as in Tunis or Constantinople. Yet even the difference of those usages in this and neighbouring cities, which are obvious to remark, is curious, and may serve to prepare the traveller who enters the peninsula by this road, for that infinite variety of habits which distinguishes the provinces of Italy.

London and Edinburgh do not afford the contrast which is presented by Turin and Milan, though only a day's journey from each other.

Thus, for instance, call on a person at Turin, and you find him basking in the full glare of a summer's sun. The Milanese, on the contrary, has the good sense to exclude heat and flies, and sits in twilight as long as the dog-star rages.

It is not hotter at Milan than at Turin or Verona, yet this rational practice has neither passed east nor west. Such things in themselves would not deserve observation; but that they serve, as I said before, to mark the insulation, as it may be called, of every Italian city, even where commerce and communication are most easy.

As to what is more worthy of attention, the national character of the Piedmontese; I believe *Alfieri*'s picture of himself and his servant is a faithful likeness of his unsophisticated countrymen; and let me add that wherever I

have followed this distinguished author, I have found him a faithful painter of manners, notwithstanding the boldness of his strokes and the height of his colouring. For the sophisticated Piedmontese; he appears to me, wherever I have met him going loose about the world, but a bad imitation of the Frenchman, upon whose model he appears to have formed himself.

Yet though this province has been, in a great degree frenchified, there is always something which marks transalpine character, and I recollect being as much struck by a whimsical custom, on my first passage through Piedmont, as I probably should be by any singular observance in Otaheite.

In almost every barber's shop in the country, in addition to the equivalent for our "Shave-for-a penny-inscription," you see *Qui si scrive sulla testa.* I of course asked an explanation, and was informed that it was a common practice amongst the lower orders in the country, to have their own initials, perhaps those of their mistress, or any other capricious symbol, cut in their hair, as children sow their cypher in mustard and cress in England. Thus I once saw a man with the cypher of his mistress whom he had lost, cut on his forelocks and remember thinking I had discovered a new beauty in the "*Italia*,

Italia," of *Filicaja,* and that he must have had this usage before his eyes, in the line,

" Che scritti in fronte per gran doglia porte."

But I unluckily found that the custom was peculiar to Piedmont, and that *Filicaja* had never been there. So much for the discoveries of commentators!

The traveller scarcely expects to find antiquities in this land of the *Allobroges;* yet Turin is in possession of one which is interesting in other points of view than as a mere remnant of art.—I allude to the *tavola Isiaca.* In this is to be found the exact representation of the modern Venetian gondola, without its *felze* or hutch, which makes no essential part of the boat, but ships and unships at pleasure.

Following this train of recollections, I should say that the drawing comparisons between the former and present state of art and the being enabled to ascertain what usages have come down to the moderns, unaltered from the ancients, makes one of the great charms of antiquarian pursuits. Such speculations often entertained me at *Pompeja,* and I remember, returning one day from thence, to have met a jackass with a pack-saddle, the precise counter-

part of one (ass and housings) which I had seen there, in picture on the walls.

Huc redeo unde abii: Amongst the customs of Venice, it is curious to observe how many seem to have been borrowed from the Egyptians. In the island of *San Cristoforo,* now converted into a general burying ground, was preserved the body of the *Doge Moro,* in a *sarcophagus,* which, both in its form and materials, corresponds with the description of that discovered by *Belzoni.*

But as I am on the subject of dead Doges, I should remark that an infinitely more curious process observed with respect to these, seems to have been borrowed from the same source. An old statute of Venice, which went, as Scotch lawyers say, into desuetude, enjoined a posthumous trial of these sovereigns of the Adriatic. Those who had any thing to allege against one, were invited to prefer their charges upon his death, and if after their examination, the body was cast, a fine, proportionate to the offence, was levied on the goods or lands of the deceased.

But I am transporting you at a flight from one country to another in a way very different from that in which I travelled myself; for in my way homewards, I deviated from the straight road in order to make an excursion in the principality of Parma.

I was not influenced in this visit by the wish of seeing what are called lions, for I knew there were none to be seen, but I had heard this small state spoken of in the rest of Italy, as the only one which was well governed; perhaps in the spirit of gallantry, or perhaps in the foolish love of whatever was connected with Buonaparte.

I soon however saw how ill deserved were these encomiums. I found here the same system in vigour (if this be not an abuse of the word) as in Austrian Lombardy, "with new additions never made before." Take as instances the accumulation of a debt, the interest of which was not even paid, whilst antiquated and long resisted pecuniary claims of Rome were acknowledged and discharged, sundry monastic orders restored, and in short whatever weakness could graft upon stupidity and perverseness.

This naturally leads me to some general reflections on the political state of Italy.

Taking one's stand on the last of this cluster of kingdoms it is impossible not to cast one's eyes back for a moment on the prospect which we are leaving behind us.

It was my first intention to give a somewhat detailed description of it, and to point out the

characteristic features of the governments into which it is divided. But when I considered the thing better, I observed, that however such a picture might be diversified by light and shade, the parts were essentially the same, and the same style of colouring prevailed throughout the whole.

All these petty states are administered nearly upon one model. All have preserved whatever there was of domineering and rapacious in the French system; all have cast away whatever there was of salutary in the new scheme of things, and renewed whatever was most odious and most contemptible in the old.

I have dwelt most upon the administration of the Austrian provinces; because these are the most important, and most likely to influence more or less, the lot of the great continent of Europe. But as a proof that the imperial portion is not worse governed than the rest of Italy, let us take a single glance at the state which ranks next in power and in influence; respecting which there cannot, I think, be a difference of opinion amongst those who are not, as Elbow says, "cardinally given." Such I should imagine would be few: for the *Catholics* have on every occasion and in every case, with the ex-

ception of Spain, breathed a very different spirit from that of this *papistical* peerage.*

Not to retouch that most mischievous and monstrous principle of taxing exported products, let us merely see how it is acted upon. During the last year of scarcity, the *prohibition* of exporting grain was, if ever, justifiable. Yet this, though forbidden to the community, was permitted to favoured individuals, I suppose in foolish trust; and the cardinal-legate of Bologna was calculated to have made 50,000 francs by this legitimate source of profit, whilst hundreds were perishing by famine.

Under the government of France the *annona-laws* slept, and justice, civil as well as criminal, was well and expeditiously distributed. At present, there is no one, uninfluenced by passion, who would not rather renounce a debt than endeavour to recover it by law: while the *Campagna* has been desolated to the very gates of Rome by miscreants, of whose warfare she has only obtained a remission by such a treaty as has laid the foundation of future outrages, besides covering her government with contempt. Of this treaty I have, I believe, touched the principal

* Yet Rome has at present a liberal Pope and a liberal prime minister.

article—that of the wretches being bribed into a temporary surrender by the promise of their being "lodged and fed at public charge;" these bag-banditti being at the expiration of a certain period to be again turned out for the diversion of the public.

During the government of France the Roman state had fine roads and noble public institutions. These are going to decay; yet she pays, under the *prediale* and *sopra imposte*, as much or more (if I may believe Romans) than when subject to hostile usurpation.

This is the case, directly or indirectly, with all the provinces of Italy: they suffer, to say the least, all the evil, and share in little of the good, produced by the revolution.

Can this state of things last? If you say, the machine performed its functions, well or ill, once, and why should not it hold together now? I answer, that this piece of mechanism does not resemble what it *was;* for in the reconstruction, new principles have been adopted, which necessarily tend to its speedy destruction. For instance, these governments were always, no doubt, weak; but they were at least indulgent to the subject. Thus, *that* under immediate consideration had always its banditti and its *annona laws;* but it was sufficient to its ex-

penses without the levy of direct taxes, exacting even less than the old Venetian aristocracy.

Despotism had, moreover, formerly something to rest upon. Religion was not then, as now, nearly extinct in Italy. The priesthood were respected, and a rich and privileged nobility, as well as the hierarchy, weighed naturally and powerfully on the side of the prince. The priesthood is now without influence; and the nobility, since the abolition of the rights of primogeniture, and their feudal privileges, is not only without weight, but has, of course, no longer any motive of attachment to the government; and has indeed, under the pressure of the times, taken a character, which is least of all favourable to the support of absolute power.*

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* The taxes falling entirely on the landed proprietor, with the exception of those which bear upon the merest necessaries of life, the nobility, already impoverished by the abolition of the rights of primogeniture, &c. have had recourse to all sorts of *ways and means* and taken a peddling character, which runs nearly throughout the cast. The number of those who lend money privately, on what we should call usurious terms, is inconceivable, and many deal in the details of commerce, without even the assistance of agents. I have known a noble sell his wine at his own back-door. Observing a machine in the entry to a gentleman's house, and asking him its purpose, he told me it was to weigh merchandize; and I shall not easily

It is moreover a very serious consideration that not only are the weights and pendulum of this

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forget another visit, in which I passed through a double rank of women and girls, spinning and preparing silk, who entirely occupied the spacious porticoes of a country-house, the hall of which was half covered with mulberry leaves, the food of silk-worms: What was worse, my own stockings were covered with fleas who fed upon the women: The reptile-stink absolutely obliged me to hold my nose, while the rattle of the wheels was such as would have provoked the horse-whip of Lismahago.

But to return to the sort of *gavel-kind* which has been established all over the continent, wherever French power took permanent root, this (a sign of the times) is generally considered in Italy as a thing called for by the spirit of the age; and in an eulogium on Buonaparte, pronounced in the academy of *Cesena*, since printed and puffed, it is ridiculously made a principal ground of praise.

In point of fact, however, this regulation of property, as indeed the whole of the French civil code, sprang out of the revolution, the principles of which it was well calculated to promote. Buonaparte could not, therefore, as "the child and champion of Jacobinism," directly oppose it; but he was too sensible of the obvious danger with which it threatened monarchy, not to attempt a relief. It was to effect this that he re-established the principle of the *majorat*, which would in time, to a degree, have countermined the effects of an eternal sub-division of property. He assigned estates in conquered countries to his new nobles, strictly entailed on their eldest heir male, and upon failure of such, revertible to the crown.

This ingenious outwork covered a yet more efficient defence.

machine altered, the medium too is changed in which they are to play; and the tone which marks this age is (in many respects most unhappily) not that which characterized the last. I venture but one conjecture as to what is to be the ultimate end of this: "no good: of that be sure." For the present, a recollection of their past sufferings and the necessity of repose, keeps the Italians quiet; but these are only temporary sedatives, and begin to wear out. The mine is charged anew, and if any accident gives it fire, half Europe will be shattered by the shock.

The possessors of these estates were enabled to sell them on condition of vesting the price received in other lands of equal value to be *purchased in France* and settled to the same uses.

This note may serve a second purpose. It may serve to illustrate the strange ignorance of the *mass* of Italians, even on subjects of common information. We have here a learned academician pronouncing a discourse, in which he praises his idol for being the author of a system which had been forced upon him, and which he had attempted to thwart and undermine.

THE END.

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ERRATA.

VOL. I. p. 304, line 20, for 'Oscan *and* Atellan,' read 'Oscan *or* Atellan.'

VOL. II. p. 45, line 13, for 'were not worth a nominative,' read 'were not *always* worth a nominative.'